from. In Humad. What have I been closing. Is ? wot much . I'm afrasel , at back mit es We Dave to Say in most peoples An Adventure of few flage to n swope of les in Journaling swar of least, - in fact, we are all taken aback. It is flat what you see It frue. Today, Hill, if a kind of et Welcome by William Burke peoples pour if onight well have changed into a grim n ind ne are pomuch more accustomed to is wewing, we proyed in the litary for all cufed for Christs' Sche; we are after all cre-I felt Somewhet at a loss fince I coulder Russic as I'm well to do for to long. would lack subjects for prayer ... vent and the liturgy of teantiful - lost y from I will leave again ( in few clays), destime. Nost of meet year will be spent desti-

#### **CONTENTS**

Welcome

Fore-word

Original Sin-tax

Wonder

**Pro-verbs** 

**Re-visions** 

Comparisons

Confessions

Love Letters

Praise

Communion

**Death Sentences** 

Life Sentences

After-word

## Welcome by Father William. Burke

Welcome to an adventure....

Like most good adventures, this one involves daring, uncertainty and discovery.

It's an adventure called meditation with a pen.

The Dominicans have a wonderful description of their work, contemplata aliis tradere: to hand on to others what the believer has thought through and prayed over. Nothing less than that! For as listeners, we all wait for the authentic sound of conviction and experience in the voice of our teachers.

In this intriguing book, Ken Trainor invites us to live that Dominican motto ourselves, to think things through and pray over them, to research ourselves and the questions and beliefs that make us who we are. He leads the way with his own words and with excerpts from Scripture he hopes will illuminate his thoughts. He then invites us to respond with our thoughts and with our written words.

To meditate is to make our minds hold still for a moment so we can hear more clearly the conversation going on inside us. It is to let ideas and experiences we care about take root for a while, rather than allowing them to be blown away almost instantly by the next distraction.

And taking up the pen, compelling ourselves to write as part of this process, can focus us wonderfully.

I met Ken Trainor six years ago, when I was working at Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Park, Illinois. Ken is a parishioner there and an editor and columnist for the weekly local newspaper, *The Wednesday Journal*. His column, like his reactions to my homilies, always took me beyond the immediate moment to larger questions. I was not surprised to learn that every year he spends a week of retreat with the Trappist monks in Iowa. As he wrote in one Christmas letter: "The monks at New Melleray, without knowing it, have taught me most of what I know about meditation. Each year for twelve years, five days at a time, I've been learning a little more about the contemplative life and attempting to apply it to the considerably more frenetic, materialistic, market-driven world we live in—the one that has blown Christmas way out of proportion. I'm a slow study, but each year I make progress."

What Ken discovered, every monk knows: The most profound insights will not yield to speed; slow progress is the only good kind of progress. But most of us are not monks, with a life dedicated to solitude and prayer. We must carve out of our busyness a place and a time to meditate. Any place will do, as long as it allows us some peace. Any time will do—morning, noon, evening—the best being the time we are most reflective. As an aid to our meditation, Ken Trainor offers us this book and this advice: Write it down; dare to say in print—a word, a phrase, a sentence—anything that holds the moment for us and won't let it get away.

The theme of this book offers us a focus and a way to begin: "Hearing a great silence, I asked the Spirit to speak through me—with wisdom, about life...and love."



#### Hearing a great silence....

My niece has always been an observant person. Once, when she was a little girl, she sat with the women of our clan at the Thanksgiving table. The meal was over, most of the men were in the front room watching football. The women traditionally cherished this time for conversation. My niece sat watching her elders, listening intently, her eyes focused on each speaker in turn. (Which is why, even to this day, children love her. She *listens*.)

Watching from a doorway that day, I noticed that my niece had already learned a sad fact about family conversations: that sometimes a person goes beyond chit-chat and speaks from the heart...and no one responds. One aunt had just done exactly that. She had made an observation beyond the usual, sharing a deep sorrow she felt in her life. Under her words she was saying: *Follow me, ask me more about this, does anyone understand?* But after a moment of silence, someone changed the subject and the conversation flowed away from her. My niece's face registered surprise and sadness. She continued to watch her aunt, too young to know what to say, old enough to know something was wrong. Her aunt had risked being vulnerable and had been abandoned.

Imagine for a moment that *you* are sitting there, watching this other person speak from the heart and look for response.

Now imagine that the person you are looking at is...yourself.

The "great silence" Ken Trainor heard is one that cries out to be filled.



#### I asked the Spirit to speak through me....

Saint Paul writes in The Letter to the Romans: "The Spirit comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray. The Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the Spirit means."

When I begin to meditate, I may discover something surprising: The conversation has started "without" me. My subconscious is already hashing things out with God. Through meditation, I tune in to a lovers' exchange that began when I did. Now I make this a conscious conversation, catching up with myself, so to speak. I ask the Spirit to speak through me to myself, and so to God. As my awareness of this conversation deepens and I take a more conscious part, my prayer life matures.

Leon Bloy once wrote, in the persona of God the Father: "You imagine that when you talk to yourself like this, you are talking to me. And so you are."

Saint Paul is right. We don't necessarily need words, either oral or written. But "weak as we are," most of us need words to help us focus, as did the authors of the Scriptures, who had to express the Divine Inexpressible. With them, we dare to say....



#### With wisdom, about life...and love.

Is Ken Trainor serious? Who among us is a Thomas Merton or an Annie Dillard? But we are not asked to do anything here but begin with our own lives, our own loves. After all, no one knows more about those matters than we do...if we go inside ourselves and listen.

Wisdom is not knowledge, which we can leave in a corner, unused. Wisdom is not understanding, which may help explain something to us but need not lead us to where we still need to go. Wisdom—with God's help—uses *both* knowledge and understanding to move beyond each of them to a fuller, richer comprehension of ourselves and others.

In the dynamic of Christian spirituality, all is prelude.

Forty-five years ago, I kept a diary during my studies in theology. I was in Rome during the Second Vatican Council years. It was an extraordinary, exhilarating time. As a result, I grew increasingly exasperated with myself as I saw my written words fail to convey the wonder of what I was experiencing. I would finish an entry and then groan at how banal the words seemed, how terribly inadequate. Sometimes I had to force myself to write.

Today I treasure that journal I kept. I love its inadequacy, its fumbling words, its labored prose. I can feel through those words how I felt back then, what I was trying to say. In those pages, I can almost *meet* the person I was. The diary helps me see how far I've come. But more importantly, it shows me how far I have *not yet* come.

A blessing on your own writing adventure. Dare to say what is in your heart, and let the words fall where they may.

Wisdom lies ahead.

Fore-word



## Hearing a great silence, I asked the spirit to speak through me —with wisdom, about life...and love.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Original Sin-tax In the beginning) was the Word, and the Word, was with God, and the Word, was God....

All things came into being through him, and what has come into being in him was life.

## In the beginning was the word, and the word stretched into sentences, and we dwelt among them.

(	On the day of ou	r birth, we wei	e sentenced to	life
_	-a life sentence, e	arned and lear	ned, word by w	vord.

The soul is wisdom's echo chamber-	—where words resound.

#### A word on a page is the heaviest object in the universe. It cannot be lifted.

# Words embody thought. They are the soul's outerwear.

And the Word, became flesh.