

FR ALAN'S REFLECTION

PRACTICE

When I arrived in Fiji at the beginning of 1999, I began by studying the Fijian language full time for 5 months. Classes were for two hours each morning. After taking a break for lunch and practicing new words on the staff who were willing to help me, I would then spend 4 hours in the afternoon revising. I would go over and over the sentences I had learnt that day. I would give myself "little tests" to check my memory. Despite trying to vary it there were times I found the going quite tedious. However, I kept going, motivated by the knowledge I would not get a chance like this again for several years. Over time my study became easier. As I increased my vocabulary and became more fluent in the language it became enjoyable. What seemed to be tedious study became liberating with practice.

In the Gospel Jesus tell his disciples "If you love me you will keep my commandments. We can be tempted to think of commandments as oppressive restrictive and inhibitive. More rules to weigh us down so it seems. There is no question. Jesus' expectations of his disciples tell us that the Commandments make demands and require constant practice. Hopefully, what will motivate us is the knowledge that the Commandments were designed so that we would live with complete freedom. This message from Jesus came immediately after washing the disciples' feet. Jesus not only spoke about the Commandments. He practiced what he preached.

Larry Gelwix coached the Highland Rugby Team in Utah, USA from 1976-2012. They had an extraordinary record at schoolboy level. They won 419 games in that time and only lost ten times. As extraordinary as that record is it is not as extraordinary as the moral code Larry Gelwix expected his team to live by. In one interview he spoke about his love of Rugby but said it was not nearly as important as integrity, honour, hard work, commitment, sacrifice, education and family. The focus was more on building people who would be champions in life than on building championship teams. One of the sayings he was known for was 'Practice does not make perfect. It makes permanent.'

This is what the commandments will do for us. They will enable us to live lives of excellence no matter what our chosen endeavours are. The effect will be permanent. However, we must be prepared to continually practice them if we want to experience the liberation they promise.