



THE MARK

April 2007
Volume 19
Number 4

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ♦ A Contemplative Christian Community



The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane Austin, Texas 78746

Non Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Austin TX
Permit # 3386

Life Is A World Away From Style

by Tim Cook

As I waited for the traffic signal to change, I noticed a billboard on a roof across the street. With a happy, easy flair it was making a promise to all passersby. It was seemingly innocuous, offering seductive and glamorous possibilities to anyone who would take the bait. But to my experienced eyes the hook was right there, too. It was almost invisible because it has become so familiar, but a hook, nonetheless.

The sign read, *“From Pickup Trucks To Tummy Tuck... Lifestyle loans for what you want now,”* followed by the name of a lender. It gave me pause to remember and ponder my personal history and how it felt to be the guy who had a life-style but no Life. I bought in to the addictive promise that if I got things and went places I would be happy. I gave no thought to the future. I wanted things now. I could get them now. I would not have to pay for them until some invisible future called, “later.” It never occurred to me that there were day-to-day implications and complications in the future I was creating, when this “later” became “now.” When the true price would

inevitably be paid.

The true price was extracted from me as the endless feeling of being in debt that hung over me like a dark cloud and followed me like a shadow. It was always present as a toxic emotional burden, a subterranean feeling that something was not right. The bait was the idea that I could get whatever I want right now. The hook was loans and credit. Getting caught was the day and night burden of servitude to debt. The true cost was the daily loss of joy, peace and freedom. So much for my hope for happiness from a lifestyle.

With his characteristic and starkly unapologetic clarity, Thomas Merton helps us see past the seeming normality of this way we live. He addresses the issue of living in a deeply flawed culture that makes promises that we all know not to be true.

“How is it that our comfortable society has lost its sense of the value of truthfulness? Life has become so easy that we think we can get along without telling the truth. A liar no longer needs to

feel that his lies may involve him in starvation. If life were a little more precarious, and if a person who could not be trusted found it more difficult to get along with other men, we would not deceive ourselves and one another so carelessly. But the whole world has learned to deride veracity or to ignore it. Half the civilized world makes a living by telling lies. Advertising, propaganda, and all other forms of publicity that have taken the place of truth have taught men to take it for granted that they can tell other people whatever they like, provided it sounds plausible and evokes some kind of shallow emotional response.” (No Man Is An Island, 1955)

Another current ad campaign reveals another angle on the same charade, saying, “Life takes Visa.” I think it’s a lot more likely that Visa takes Life. Credit cards support “lifestyle.” Whatever style it is, it is radically removed from Life itself. Lifestyle, like all fashion and custom, is constantly changing and evolving. Its forms of expression are always passing away and new fashions, that create new wants and

make new unfulfillable promises of happiness continuously arise as the generations roll on. History is filled with the account of our search for something outside ourselves to keep us distracted from the inner ache of a life without the direct experience of our oneness with God. In Roman times it was “bread and circuses.” Our present way of doing it is consumerism.

These baits and their invisible hooks, however, always have a catch. They capture our attention both consciously and unconsciously and enslave us with the unending feeling that we are separate from our good. Like babies in their cribs reaching out toward the brightly colored objects we dangle before them, we continue to reach and grab for so-called “goods,” the products that the so-called “good life” dangles before us. Addicted to passing fancies, ever-burdened by unending payment, we are and remain unknowingly dead to our true God-given Life. That True Life is always present within us simply awaiting our notice, ready to pour itself into us, as the experience of infinite Love. It enters through our own attention; the very attention we have been fruitlessly spending on the seductive baits the culture drags before us.

The stakes here are almost

incomprehensibly enormous. We each are called to choose between the usual man’s outer-oriented living death (the animated existence devoid of Spirit), and an inner reality of endless outpourings of Love. But how can we stop “owing our soul to the company store”? How can we remain in this world yet not be of it?

Jesus Christ offers us the way. He leads us to the Father who we meet within ourselves. The Father is Love and He repeatedly and progressively erases the habitual, illusory barrier of separation that is the cause and source of all our suffering. He does not promise that our difficulties in the world will be magically erased, but that they will be outshined by His love. Jesus clearly states the situation to his disciples:

“When a woman gives birth, she has a hard time, there’s no getting around it. But when the baby is born, there is joy in the birth. This new life in the world wipes out memory of the pain. ... I’ve told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I’ve conquered the world.” (John 16:21,33 The Message)

Christ has lifted us from the burden of our debts and freed us from our bondage. He is the True

Life that has overcome the world, not by force but by love. Love conquers the separation, love conquers the fear, love conquers the death of living empty of Spirit. The Easter celebration is our annual witness to the absolute reality of God’s love for the world and the overcoming power of that love. We are personally invited to participate in Christ’s resurrection. His risen presence is actually part and parcel of every member of the human race, calling each of us to choose to follow Him as His disciples.

The way of discipleship is the spiritual journey, a journey in which our attention migrates from its bondage in the Egypt of culture to the promised land within our very own hearts. The journey is long and sometimes leads us through deserts. But God remains to lead and guide and feed and protect us without fail. The promised land within us is “a land overflowing with milk and honey,” the truly good life. That Life is freedom and truth. ☸

*...you will begin to wake up
from this hypnotic sleep
which is called the so-called
waking state of man.*

~ Maurice Nicoll
*Psychological Commentaries on the
Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*

Joining Christ in His Life, Death, Resurrection

by Barbara Cook

Each year since I began my practice of Centering Prayer I have become more aligned with the desire of the Holy Spirit to help me empty myself of self. I am increasingly aware that the false self that I cobbled together in childhood for protection is now the obstacle that stands between me and God's constant and unconditional love. It also blocks intimacy with others and with life itself. Everyone with a Centering Prayer practice becomes aware of the false self. It is revealed to us through the gentle grace of God's love and by the wonderful teachings we have been given by Fr. Thomas Keating.

Lent provides an opportunity that is especially relished by many of us who are budding contemplatives. It is a time to put aside some attachment that helps hold our false selves in place. During Lent we "die" to some habit for forty days. Through that small gesture of dying, we make room for increased awareness of our Beloved. The space we create helps us see how much we put things, persons and objects before Christ and our true selves. Sometimes we even have to struggle a bit to make

that small gesture of love and sacrifice. But even this effort only helps to strengthen our faith. Through releasing this small consolation, we open a way to a deeper experience of joining Christ in resurrection in the glorious Easter celebration. Even if you didn't choose to participate in a forty day mini-death for your false self this year, your twice-daily Centering Prayer practice still sustains the process. In God's silent embrace we die daily to the false self during each prayer period.

As I'm writing this we are still in the middle of Lent, our time of going into the desert with Jesus. Yet the new life of spring is already bursting forth into flowers as if it can't wait to shout the Good News ... He Is Risen!!! I am already looking forward to the events of Easter week. This year, on Saturday March 31, the day before Palm Sunday, Fr. Thomas will be hosting an all-day retreat that includes two conferences. We will also have our annual Taize service, our Good Friday service, and then a 24-hour prayer vigil. On Easter morning we all gather for our sunrise service and a

contemplative walk with our Lord. Then we'll have our Lectio Divina service, a quiet time to ponder the events of the day, and finally our Celebration service at 10 am.

Our Lenten preparation is our participation in the dryness of the desert experience. It helps us prepare to experience the rich fullness of Easter in all its glory and promise. It is our foretaste of the interior resurrection that awaits us when we discover and learn to live in The Kingdom of Heaven within us; the promise of the prayer and the spiritual journey.

As with Jesus, we take this journey not just for ourselves but for all those on the way, and for this poor world of ours. Jesus offered Himself so that the whole human race could experience love, forgiveness and union with the Father. But each one of us must personally choose to follow Him by picking up our own personal crosses. We must do it now while we still have the light of day.

I pray that each of us will have a deeply felt experience of Christ's passion, death and resurrection this Easter. ☉



The Wish

by Lauri Raymond

Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

I've been mourning *something* for as long as I can remember.

By "mourning" I mean aching for something, wishing for something that seems to be lost. My Dad once told me, chuckling, that as a child I would walk around shaking my head, worried. He said it was as if I were saying to myself, "This can't be my family. There's been some kind of mistake." I laughed but I didn't deny it; that felt very familiar.

As a teenager, I can remember sitting on a wall, looking out over a moonlit lake. I felt sad and alone, like there was something missing and I'd never be able to find it because I didn't know what to look for. It was a mystery.

Looking back, I can see that I tried to solve that hidden mystery by rushing through life in a very unconscious way. My resume was full and noisy — school, work, relationships, marriage, divorce, acting, marriage, the birth of a son, start a business and then ... a five year separation which lead to another divorce.

Something was very wrong. I was grieving my lost ideal life and though many times I blamed others for my unhappiness, I began to hear whispers within that the things of life — relationships, jobs, acting, even a child, couldn't fill the void I felt. I didn't trust myself to make good decisions and I pulled back from life as far as I could with a living to make and a child to raise.

In 1989 I became a serial attendee of the Church of Conscious Harmony. I spent chunks of time at 3 locations of the church — 360, Steck and Sri Atmananda — but kept wandering away. Each time I returned, I would sit there and be blown away by what I heard; I was being moved at a very deep level. But eventually my attention would turn to some life concern or I would get mad — the way we can sometimes get angry when someone speaks the Truth to us — and I was out of there.

I began to practice a kind of peer counseling that taught that we are inherently good; that we all

received hurts early in life by well meaning people who were also hurt; that unexpressed emotions related to those hurts caused us to act irrationally instead being able to respond freshly to present time. In this counseling, two people took turns for a discreet amount of time being the counselor (really the listener) and client. For the first time, I learned to express those emotions ... not to the person I thought I was angry at in the moment, but in a safe environment with someone who remembered that I was good — and that the person I was talking about was also good. I learned that I didn't have to believe these old feelings or act out of them. I just had to get them out of my body without hurting anyone.

Everything began to look lighter. I began to feel lighter. Very tentatively I began seeing a wonderful man. I felt like I had a handle on how to do life.

Then, suddenly, harsh life events began to hit again. First there was a family crisis in which

many people were hurt. In the midst of these events, the man I loved decided he wanted to explore other possibilities. I was devastated. I cried non-stop for weeks. I cried so much that I became aware that I was crying for more than the events surrounding the crisis and the lost relationship. Deep, deep wells of tears flowed out of me. I felt like I was crying for everyone who has ever cried or needed to.

*O God, you are my God,
earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts
for you, my body longs for you, in a
dry and weary land where there is
no water. (Psalm 63:1)*

And then it stopped. And there was a space where the tears had been. The space was a vacuum, a silence, a hunger, a prayer — a wish. It was a deeply felt wish for something I had been missing and mourning my whole life. The wish was for God. The wish was from God. The wish *was* God.

Father Keating says that the correct translation of “Blessed are they” in the Beatitudes is, “Oh Happy are they.” It seems funny. “Oh Happy are they who mourn.” For me it means, “Oh Happy are they who wish for God.”

That wish brought me back to the Church of Conscious Harmony where I started at the beginning. I

took a Centering Prayer class and began a practice in earnest. I went on silent retreats, began studying The Work, was baptized and, fifteen years after walking into the church, I became a member.

Of course my personality would love to declare, “Well now that’s taken care of! Check enlightenment off the list.”

*A man, a woman, must
sacrifice their mechanical suffering
What then replaces it? What
replaces it is suffering because you
are suffering. That is, you must
replace the luxury of mechanical
suffering by suffering because you
still love mechanical suffering.
Maurice Nicoll - Psychological
Commentaries on the Teachings of
Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*

Obviously, I’m still very much in the middle of this journey. The concerns of life are still a powerful attraction and my attention gets pulled away from God many times a day. I go to sleep and wallow in negative emotions. I forget. This amnesia that leads back down the path of separation is painful. But I keep observing and even accepting my mechanical behavior and sometimes, ever-so-slowly, it falls away. And the more I sit in the silence, the more God gently, lovingly... and sometimes humorously... reveals more old

“stuff” that I get to observe. My friends, family, employees ... the whole world has become my teacher.

The second part of Jesus’ 3rd Beatitude is, “for they shall be comforted.” And for me, that has been gloriously true. It’s not that difficult life events don’t happen anymore. It’s just that the whole context for them has shifted.

*And the peace of God, which
passeth all understanding, shall
keep your hearts and minds through
Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)*

In February, after a week in the hospital, my Dad died. As people always say, though he was old, it was unexpected. I will be missing him and pondering, not only the events surrounding his death, but also what his passing means to me, for a long time. One thing I know already: I felt God’s presence profoundly during that week and all through his passing. There was beauty and healing and peace. There was a regular woman with her regular family and she was comforted.

God is amazing. We are so individually loved. Once we wish, the events of our lives are intricately, mysteriously, and astoundingly arranged for our good. And I’ve come to realize that this goodness has unfolded

both forward and backward in time; everything leading to this moment has *always* worked for my transformation. God led me to peer counseling so I would not have myself committed when the tears started. I signed up in January to write this article about mourning. Then Dad died in February.

Another wonderful example of what happened after I wished: That man I loved who wanted to explore other possibilities embarked on his own journey of self discovery while I was recreating The Great Flood. That man is now my husband. Thank You, God.

When I consider the actual nature of compunction, I am amazed at how that which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness interwoven within it, like honey in the comb.

The Venerable John of the Ladder 

*We must be awake
to the conscious view
that the experience belongs to us
because our being needs it
in order to develop.*

~ Maurice Nicoll
*Psychological Commentaries on the
Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*

CCH Bookstore

Community Reading

The Return of the Prodigal Son
by Henri Nouwen
Begins April 15th

Readings for April

The Kingdom of God is Like...
by Father Thomas Keating

Why Can't We be Good?
by Jacob Needleman

Listen on CD

The Return of the Prodigal Son
Read by Dan Anderson

The Inner Room CD
Music and Chants
with Father Thomas Keating
reading scripture

Job and the Mystery of Suffering
by Richard Rohr

CD & Tape Sets Available for:
The Mark & Sunday services
Bookstore Hours

Monday-Friday 8:30am-3:30pm
Sunday 9-10am and after service

Please contact the bookstore
for additional information
512.347.9673

bookmgr@consciouharmony.org

APRIL Calendar

Visit consciouharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

Good Friday Prayer Service
Apr 6 12noon-1pm

Prayer Vigil
Apr 6 1pm - Apr 7 1pm
sign up for 1/2 hour time periods

Half Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Apr 7 8:30am-12:30pm
\$15 no need to pre-register

Redirecting Children's Behavior
Mondays, continues through Apr 16
6:30-9:30pm pre-registration required

The Essence of Christian Mysticism
with Bernadette Roberts
April 20-21 9am-4pm
pre-register | \$100

Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30pm
Sacred Chanting Apr 3
Gurdjieff Music Apr 17

Community Workday
Apr 28 9am-12noon

Weekly

Centering Prayer Group
Mondays 7:30-9pm

Prayer Circle
Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Knitting Circle
Wednesdays 10:30am-12noon
All levels of experience are welcome to knit items to
send to Pine Ridge in the fall.

Contemplative Lunch
Wednesdays 12noon-1pm

Mid-Week Communion Service
Wednesdays 6-7pm

Lessons In Truth
Wednesdays 7:30pm through Apr 25

Fr. Keating Spiritual Journey Video Series
Wednesdays 7:30pm begins May 2

Daily

Daily Centering Prayer Service
M-F 7-7:35am



The Garden of the Resurrection

*Then Jesus said, 'Mary!'
Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew,
'Raboni!' (which means 'Master').*

John 20:16

In scripture, to be called by name has special significance.

To call someone by name is to identify who they are.

By calling Mary by her name, Jesus manifests His knowledge of everything in her life and His total acceptance of all that she is.

This is the moment in which Mary realizes that Jesus loved her.

This is the first step in her transformation . . . The realization of being loved by God characterizes the first stage of contemplative prayer.

It enables us to see God in all things . . .

The second stage is to then see all things in God . . .

then it is to enter into the human potential for unlimited growth . . .

This is the transformed consciousness of inner resurrection.

And this is the Good News Mary was sent to announce to the apostles.

She is sent out of the garden,

but with the abiding interior state the garden represents:

the certitude of being loved by God, of loving Him in return, and of

God giving Himself in every event and at every moment,

both within or without. In this state, outside and inside

are in harmony; they have become one.

Like Mary Magdalene, Christ is also

calling us by name as we celebrate

the feast of His resurrection.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

I will give you a new heart

and place a new spirit within you.

From the Cantic of Ezekiel 36:26



The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
info@consciousharmony.org
www.consciousharmony.org

MINISTERS

Tim and Barbara Cook

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael Begeman
Mary Anne Best
Eric DeJernett
Donald Genung
Pamela Gursoy
Edward Pierce
Mary Theriot
Bob Rader, Emeritus

MUSIC

Susan Boulden, Director
musicdir@consciousharmony.org
Sue Young

YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES

Deborah Hale, Children's Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
Don Hale, Youth Director
youthdir@consciousharmony.org

OFFICE

Mon-Fri 8:30am-4:30pm
Donald Genung, Business Mgr
bizmgr@consciousharmony.org
Lisa Genung, Office Mgr
officemgr@consciousharmony.org
David Pickett, Facility Mgr
facilitymgr@consciousharmony.org

BOOKSTORE

Sun 9-10:00am & 11:30am-12:30pm
Mon-Fri 8:30am-3:30pm
Mimi Conroy, Manager
bookmgr@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER

Joyce Jane Weedman, Editor
jweedman@austin.rr.com
Carol Hagar, Design
lifeisart@austin.rr.com