



# THE MARK

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The Church of Conscious Harmony  
A Contemplative Christian Community

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# A Culture of Silence

by Tim Cook

The great and ancient monastery of St. Panteleimon stands on a high bluff overlooking the Aegean Sea. It is one of more than twenty enormous monasteries and numerous hermitages that comprise the sole residences on Mount Athos, a monastic republic that occupies a large peninsula jutting out into the Aegean from Greece. These amazing architectural and spiritual treasures have survived virtually unchanged for nearly 1600 years. One reason is that there are no roads joining Mt. Athos to the mainland. Most of the area is mountainous wilderness and access is only by boat, when the frequently stormy weather permits, and that only after obtaining a very difficult to get visa and passing through rigorous customs interrogations. The monk's sole occupation is, was, and always will be prayer, undistracted, utterly focused prayer for our troubled world. They work, build and grow food to sustain their culture of prayer and while they assiduously screen out any and all would-be tourists, they welcome the few pilgrims who have the will and stamina to backpack their way around the steep and rugged trails that join the scattered monasteries to each other.

I had already visited five of the other monasteries and had arrived

at St. Panteleimon the day before, after surviving a harrowing and life-threatening ordeal. I had been completely lost in the wilderness, and was then caught on an isolated, narrow, rocky beach between the gales of a raging ocean storm and the vertical cliffs that were my only way to escape the incoming tides that would soon cover the rocks I stood on. Through faith-filled prayer and the resulting miracles I somehow made my way, with my 40-pound pack, to the monastery — bleeding, soaked, exhausted and ecstatic — before they closed the gates for the night. The kind Russian guest master had welcomed me and shown me to my cell where I dried off and fell into a deep, much needed sleep.

Now it was two o'clock in the morning, the storm had passed, the sky was clear and ablaze with stars brighter than I had ever seen and a huge full moon was rising over the sea below me. I had gotten up to attend the first of the many worship services that would be held that day but, due to language difficulties, I had mistakenly gotten up an hour early. As I stood in the courtyard between the great churches and the dormitory looking up at the sky, I experienced a new and wonderful feeling. All was completely still and silent except for the gentle, almost inaudible, sound of the endlessly

lapping waves far below me.

In that perfect stillness I experienced directly the great silence that envelops and embraces all Creation. And *I knew God*, deeper than thinking or concepts or words; deeper than I can even remember now. All the difficulties of the previous day, the many days before that of continuous prayer, hiking and worship, not speaking the language or being able to read maps or signs, and the isolation, had opened me to the vast interior stillness of perfectly eloquent silence. A great silence so deep that I could hear the Living Word of God fairly shouting his entire Creation into existence.

I was brought to a magnificent, utterly simple, nearly breathless Presence by the touch of that eternal silence as I stood there; for just a moment on the threshold of Being Itself and for the first and only time in my life I was utterly alone yet completely at peace, unafraid and filled with Spirit. And I understood in my feelings what I had previously known only in theory. I am simply *man*. Deeper and more real and true than the personality I know as Tim, I am just *man*. I could have been any one of the countless pilgrims and monks who had stood there over the long ages, during which countless civilizations and cultures had risen and fallen. The Tim mask fell away from me and I knew myself as man

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looking into the same vast sky that all men have seen as they stood alone on the surface of our tiny planet pondering the deep meaning of life.

The silence that I experienced that night is the deepest interior reality in each of us and it is the very same in everyone. It is what Fr. Keating refers to as God's first word. It is the mysterious basis and source of everything in existence, including Life Itself and our own particular lives. We have all emerged into existence from that silence and it is to that silence that we will all return. And it is that same silence that we encounter each time we let go of our thoughts and feelings to come to rest in God in Centering Prayer.

The habitual, mechanical mental forms generated by our ordinary thought, emotion and sensation act like a film over the eye of our interior awareness that screens our attention away from the Great Presence that awaits us in the silence. This silence is sometimes fearful to those who are just beginning to learn to let the touch of it into consciousness. It may seem too empty, too vast to bear. But it is not by any means empty. It is simply empty of thoughts. It is full to brimming over with Life, Truth, Peace and Joy in a way we can never even dream of until we've felt its merciful touch. But to find access to these depths requires practice and trust in God.

An anonymous author tells us that in order to feel it we must learn the art of finding a place in our consciousness "where there is nothing to suppress and where contemplation becomes as natural as breathing and


the beating of the heart ... the state of consciousness (i.e. thought, imagination, feeling and will) of perfect calm, accompanied by a complete relaxation of the nerves and the muscles of the body. It is the profound silence of desires, of preoccupations, of the imagination, of the memory and of discursive thought. One may say that the entire being becomes like the surface of calm water, reflecting presence of the starry sky and its indescribable harmony. And the waters are deep, they are so deep! And the silence grows, ever increasing ... what silence! Its growth takes place through regular waves which pass, one after the other, through your being: one wave of silence followed by a wave of more profound silence, then again a wave of more profound silence ... Have you ever *drunk silence*? If in the affirmative, you know ....

"To begin with there are moments, subsequently minutes, then 'quarters of an hour' for which silence ... lasts. With time, the silence...becomes a fundamental element *always present* in the life of the soul. ... which continues all the same when one is active, when one works or when one converses. This 'zone of silence' being once established, you can draw from it for both rest and work." (*Meditations On The Tarot* p.10-11)

From our very beginnings as a church, 20 years ago, we sought to create a culture of silence where we could discover and learn, as a community, how to be and grow ever-deeper together in that sacred stillness. But there were no models

for it, nothing for us to copy, so we had to discover it, as a group, bit by bit for ourselves. At first, none of us knew how to offer it and few of us could even appreciate the wonder and value it would add to our experience of Christian community. And sometimes we were erroneously seen as acting unfriendly or introverted. But gradually, as more of us developed our daily practices at home and participated in our grace-filled silent retreats, we grew more and more capable of bearing and sharing the gift of silence into our times together at church. And now, after many years of effort and attention, the beautiful embrace of that soul-filling spaciousness welcomes us to each service and class. We have been gifted and graced by a true culture of silence that doesn't even require us to go to a monastery to find and *drink*.

As we continue to grow in our trust in God's love, we're continuing to quiet down, individually and collectively. And we are discovering, through both personal and community experience, what Jesus was saying when he urged us, *Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.* (Matthew 6:6, *The Message*)

I sense 20 years of grace in our silence. Do you? 

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## 2008: A Year Acceptable to the Lord

*And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall our God rejoice in you. ~ Isaiah 62:5*

### Looking for Joy by Kay Streich

I've had a question on my mind this last year or so, something I've pondered out loud with some of my friends: Where has my joy gone?

I can remember being with a group of friends in the halls of my high school, talking about what we wanted to do when we "grew up." The answer I gave never changed from that time to the present: "I don't know what I want to do, I just know I want to feel at peace." What I remember most about that day and those words is how little peace I felt; how little peace I had felt for years; and how that craving for peace translated into a never-ending meandering of life choices and events that have only recently begun to find roots and direction.

I ponder the word *commitment*, and I see my life history spread out before me – an endless string of wandering from place to place and choice to choice: two years in college, a year off and a move to a different state to waitress while trying to decide "what to do with my life." Another state, another college, another major, chosen randomly and at the last minute. After graduation, another move, to a town and a work life which made me so miserable I moved back in with my parents for half a year, still trying to decide "what to do." Then to Chicago for a few months; no, that wasn't it; so back to Austin.

Several years as a temporary worker (the ultimate in an uncommitted work life!) and on it went. Intimate relationships were equally randomly chosen and uncommitted; from the time I started dating to the end of my 30's, intimate relationships never lasted for more than a year.

Meanwhile, I struggled constantly with depression. As the random meandering of my life continued, my depressions deepened, and I sought relief in entertainment, parties, drugs, and friendships. I've looked back on the times I experienced in my 20's and early 30's, times of socializing and partying, and have always thought of them as "the most fun years of my life." But when I began recently to ponder the question of joy, I found no joy in my memories of those years: excitement, yes, crazy highs and lows – but really, was there JOY there?

Throughout this period I attended a series of churches and a series of therapies, desperately trying to find some relief from my raging internal environment of simmering resentments, restlessness, doubt, anxiety, and self-loathing. It was not until I found The Church of Conscious Harmony that I found information and tools that really worked for me. Now, through the gift of Centering Prayer, I have begun a lifelong relationship with

the Divine Therapist.

For the first few years, my sits felt very difficult. Once the beginning phase of constant internal talking calmed, memories began unpacking themselves from the places I had so carefully stored them away; feelings of abandonment, betrayals, awkwardness, and humiliations all came out of hiding and demanded to be felt. The anxiety that I accepted as a constant companion appeared to be growing out of control. When I did my sit it felt as if every inch of my body was being animated with an energy that wanted to pull me apart. I didn't like it, but I stuck with it. And one day, during a sit, surrounded and invaded by what felt like a giant bubble of anxiety ... the bubble popped. And out jumped anger. Deep, strong anger, like a rushing current released from a dam. I realized then that my years of "anxiety" were really years of pressing down harder and harder on a rage that wanted to explode out of me.

I had read that as a number "nine" type on the enneagram, I was out of touch with my anger, and that this was trapping my access to my own vital energy. I had *thought* I could see the truth of that...but now I *knew*. Now I had a felt experience of what had obviously

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been driving this sensation of anxiety inside of me all these years – anxiety was a preferable alternative, apparently, to what my unconscious self clearly perceives as a very dangerous energy.

I've been afraid of anger and confrontation since childhood. My father was often angry, and it felt unsafe to respond directly with my own anger. So I bottled it inside, going into my bedroom to quietly cry out my pent up frustration, returning to the family when I had eradicated all evidence of my distressing emotions. If I ever attempted to confront someone in my life, I would find myself tongue-tied, and usually broke down in tears. The aggravation and humiliation of that made me avoid my anger even more. Now I work actively to feel my own anger and to open myself to being around the anger of others, because I realize how much my fear of this emotion keeps me at a distance from other people.

As this process unfolds, I am gaining insight into a lifetime of habitual randomness and confusion. Refusal to commit and constant change is essentially a refusal to stop and feel. It's as if a voice has been whispering in my ear for years, "If you slow down and start feeling, you'll explode." At times, it actually has felt that way. But it's just a feeling, and as Fr. Thomas says: "I can feel that."

Like a couple who have now passed through the tumultuously emotional beginning phase of their relationship, God and I are now settling down with one another. My

sits are much calmer, sometimes almost "dry," and I see that I am at a cross-roads with this relationship. This is where old habits that don't serve me want to step in and do a little tap-dance for me. I would like to say that my first centering prayer period in the morning is firmly established...except the truth is I'm often late for the appointed time, and I cut my time shorter than what I would like. And my second prayer period of the day; well, that comes and goes. Sometimes I remember how important it is to have two periods of prayer daily; more often I'm busy congratulating myself for the regularity of my first sit while I've completely forgotten my second.

Here is the refusal to commit. Here is randomness and inertia. Half-finished undertakings and piles of things I'll be organizing... soon. A constant state of motion without center. I'm too busy, I'm too tired, I'll get to it later. A state of being which has, until now, cost me my very life.

So the question as I see it is: What do I want? A life driven by my small personal will, a life which has never brought me any peace or sense of well-being, or a life committed to and centered in God? The kind of life which promises me "a peace which passes all understanding," or a life that promises to continue just as it always has – incomplete, anxious, and hurried? There's just one thing God wants from me, really – my attention. He loves me right now, just as I am, but He will truly rejoice

when I fully commit to my relationship with Him.

If I put God first, all good things will flow from that commitment: my life and my very being will be changed. I choose that commitment, consciously and willingly. I have recently recommitted to my centering prayer practice, *twice* a day, at the appointed time, as well as my daily exercises and spiritual reading practices – no matter how I feel, no matter how little time I think I have. Weekly tithing. Creating organization in my work and home life as part of a larger spiritual aim of working against my personality's desire to remain agitated and uncentered. The longer I stay true to these commitments, the more I begin to comprehend the power I am now accessing.

As I turn increasingly away from the disorganization and randomness of my life towards a disciplined life in God, the fruits of my labors are being felt. My anxiety is greatly decreased. I have not experienced a depression since I began attending Work Classes six years ago. A life of driven busyness, over-commitments and missed connections is beginning to slow down and take coherent shape – despite the fact that most of my time is still fully occupied. I now know how different it is to "believe in" God, and to have a felt experience of God. I have seen God so obviously at work in my life these last few years that it fills me with deep gratitude, amazement, and... Joy! ☺

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# A CELEBRATION!

Join us for our  
**Twentieth Anniversary Celebration**  
of praise and Thanksgiving  
**June 30 - July 6**

**Saturday, June 28 6:30 - 8:30 pm**  
Concert featuring members of our community  
and the Bells of Joy Gospel group

**Thursday, July 3 7:30 pm**  
Taize service

**Friday, July 4 7:30 pm**  
Gurdjieff music  
Childcare, along with special entertainment provided.

**Friday, July 4, 9:30 pm**  
Twenty Hour Prayer Vigil begins in Theosis Chapel.

**Saturday, July 5, 9 am**  
Preparations for Sunday event, light breakfast provided.

**Saturday, July 5, 6:30 pm**  
Devotional evening including  
Drumming Circle, SacredDancing, and Chanting.

**Sunday, July 6**  
Immediately following Sunday service  
CCH Family Picnic,  
including catered fajitas, lots of activities and games,  
a moonwalk for the children,  
sing-a-longs, slideshow presentation  
The Church of Conscious Harmony's Meetings with Remarkable People  
and fun and fellowship with our community.

## June Calendar

Visit [consciousharmony.org](http://consciousharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
June 21 8:30am-4pm  
\$15 Bring a bag lunch.

Two-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
A commuter retreat held at CCH  
June 22-23  
Pre-register at the office. \$100

Celebration Concert  
June 28 6:30- 8:30PM  
featuring CCH community musicians  
and the Bells of Joy

Song & Silence  
June 28 10am-3pm  
Pre-register at the office. \$20

### Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30 pm  
Sacred Chanting June 3

Community Workday  
June 14 8am-12noon

### Weekly

Prayer Circle  
Wednesdays 9:15 am

Contemplative Knitting Circle  
Wednesdays 10:30 am-12 noon

Contemplative Lunch  
Wednesdays 12 noon

Mid-Week Communion Service  
Wednesdays 6-7 pm

Introduction to the Work Class  
Thursdays 7:30pm

### Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service  
M-F 7-7:35 am in Theosis Chapel



## The Second Line of Work

from Volume One, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll.

You are told in the work that *if you are negative it is always your own fault*. The whole situation as recorded by the senses must be transformed. But to understand this, it is necessary to begin to think in an entirely new way.

You all can understand that life is continually causing us to react to it. All these reactions form our life—our own personal life. To change one's life is not to change outer circumstances: it is to change one's reactions. But unless we can see that outer life comes in as impressions which cause us to react in stereotyped ways, we cannot see where the point of possible change comes in, where it is possible to work. If the reactions that form your own personal life are mainly negative, then that is your life. Your life is chiefly a mass of negative reactions to the impressions that have come in every day. The transformation of impressions so that they do not always provoke negative reactions is then one's task, if one wishes to work on oneself. But for this, self-observation at the point where impressions enter us is necessary. Then one can let the impressions fall in a negative mechanical way, or not. If not, then

that is to begin to live more consciously. If one fails to transform impressions at the moment of their entry, one can always work on the results of these impressions and prevent them from having their full mechanical effect. All this requires a definite feeling, a definite evaluation of the work, for it means that the work must be brought forward, as it were, to that point where impressions enter and are being distributed mechanically

to their customary place in personality to evoke the old reactions. We will speak later much more about transformation, but it can be added that no higher level is possible of attainment unless there is *transformation*, and the very idea of transformation is based on the fact that different levels exist, and refers to the passage from one level to another level of being. No one can reach a higher level of development without transformation. Ⓐ

### Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *lectio divina*. One principle will appear in these pages each month.

6<sup>th</sup> Guideline:



The particular consequences of original sin include all the self-serving habits that have been woven into our personality from the time we were conceived;  
all the emotional damage that has come  
from our early environment and upbringing;  
all the harm that other people have done to us knowingly and unknowingly  
at an age when we could not defend ourselves;  
and the methods we acquired—many of them now unconscious—  
to ward off the pain of unbearable situations.



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## 20 Years of Grace at CCH

*from Pamela Begeman*

The Church of Conscious Harmony is where I first encountered Truth like I had never heard it or experienced it before.

I had never heard the words ‘Ultimate Reality’ spoken before, much less as something to be *experienced*. I had never heard God described as All-Knowing and All-Loving. I never knew that God was both personal and transcendent, in and out, all and everything. I never knew a place, or people, who strove to *be* as the intended image and likeness of God.

So, when I first heard these things 10 years ago – and felt the being of the people here – I knew the Truth of what I experienced and I knew it like a desperate woman dying alone in the desert. I *needed* the teachings, the practices, the community – and the struggle they inspire – to live again, to reincarnate as the daughter of the Living God I was meant to be. I never knew who I was until I came here. I never knew what my true destiny was – conscious union with

the Living God – and even more so, that it could be a reality for me, here and now.

Since then, the CCH community has become for me a place of joyful surrender, purification and participation, a place where this destiny is a shared intention that is supported, nurtured and celebrated. CCH is my spiritual family and together with my husband Michael, I live a life of practice, devotion and service, all while living in the world, but not of it. I feel my utter dependency and contingency on the love and mercy of God and I struggle to know, understand and be the teachings I take in at CCH. I wish to know everything I feel and feel everything I know in Christ consciousness. I wish for mindless embodiment as a receptive vessel for the Divine Indwelling to make me Its instrument. I wish to experience that I am in you and you are in me and together we are in the Father. The CCH community – those here now and those who have labored before – has emboldened me to wish this big and this fearlessly.

As a cell in the body of Christ, of which CCH is a microcosm, I consent to God’s presence and action in me, in this community; I consent to play my part through this divine birthright. The CCH community is God’s creation story recapitulating all over again in each one of us...and it is all very Good.

*from Mary Anne Best*

*The universe is response to request.*

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff & Ouspensky*, pg. 154

Exhausted and empty ... 20 years of constant travel (I worked as a management consultant) ... 20 years of acquisition, being away from home, noise, and inundation of information (I subscribed to nearly 30 business and industry publications in order to ‘keep up’ with clients) ... One day, I had enough. I decided to take a long driving trip alone for two weeks through northern New Mexico and Colorado. I knew I wanted to be on the ground, without demand,

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without agenda, silent, listening. What I did not know until then was that I wanted relationship with God. On one of those days, I heard a clear message *I was going home*. The year was 1988.

Little did I know that at the same time, a very intentional man and his wife were drafting the bylaws for a new church, a church grounded in the possibility of a deeper Christianity, at once new and yet ancient. A few months after returning from my sojourn, at the invitation of a friend, one Sunday, I entered a small converted bank building on Loop 360 that was The Church of Conscious Harmony. Tim announced on that Sunday that the following week they would begin showing a series of videos on the spiritual journey by someone named Fr. Thomas Keating. I decided to go.

Nineteen years have now passed. There are no words to express the magnitude of gratitude and love that I feel for Tim and Barbara and my friends in Christ. St. Paul says it so much better than I:

*I am boasting because I have to...I have heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being.*

*On behalf of someone like that I am willing to boast, but I am not going to boast on my own behalf except of my weaknesses... But I will not go on in case anybody should rate me higher than he sees and hears me to be... Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh... About this, I have three times pleaded with*

*the Lord that it might leave me, but He has answered me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'*

~ 2 Corinthians 12: 1, 5-9

*from Donald Genung*

My first connection with CCH happened in upstate NY when I heard a cassette tape of a service. There was an instant connection with the teaching that was deeper than curiosity. The sermon was intelligently delivered and it was new information that I had never heard spoken of in a church. And the topic was also emotionally attractive and stimulating.

That recording led me to the first of many wonderful books introduced by this Church: *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, by P.D. Ouspensky. In the title is the key word that was the focus of the sermon – psychology.

I had been raised to attend church, and I attended grade school at a religious school. But I had never been exposed to teachings on spiritual psychology. The connection between God and Christ was abstract, and it did not speak to my physical and psychological connection with Christ and God. And, based on their behavior, I never saw any examples in my church communities that anyone else had made the connection.

It was life changing to have a teaching that emphasized the necessity of learning about my psychology as a starting point to

understanding why I was not experiencing the presence of Christ. I know I am evolving as a result of our spiritual psychology teachings, and my life is getting better and better. I am also so grateful to be at Church with others who have developed a depth of practice of observing our false personalities and how they keep us isolated from experiencing God's love.

Growing up I could not find sufficient explanations of the connection between science and God. I wondered about the stars, planets, human body, animals, plants etc. Are they connected? Where is God in them? No one seemed to know. Then I became exposed to the spiritual cosmology teachings we have at CCH. Finally my years of science education began to have real meaning. We truly are in Christ, Christ is in us, and we are in the Father.

We have an extra ordinary Church with an advanced level of vital teachings. I am blessed in a profound way to be a part of this Church, this Body of Christ.

*from Joyce Weedman*

My road to CCH took me first to a mountain side in the Chisos Mountains 20 years ago. I was struggling in my life, trying to make sense of and get past huge losses, both personal and professional. It was New Year's Eve, bitterly cold, and for no good reason whatsoever

*continued*

## Browse the Bookstore

*Open Monday-Friday*

*8:30 am - 3:30 pm*

*Sunday 9:00 - 10:00 am*

*11:30 am - 12:30 pm*

### Audio Books for Summer travel



*Contemplative Journey 1 & 2*  
by Fr. Thomas Keating



*Contemplative Prayer*  
by Fr. Thomas Keating

*Adam's Return*  
by Fr. Richard Rohr

*Original Prayer*  
*Teachings on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*  
by Neil Douglas Klotz

*Jesus*  
*His stories & relationships with Women*  
Andrew Greeley

*Living Time* in MP3  
12 Week class by  
Tim Cook

*20 Years... continued from page 9*

I climbed alone up a steep, rocky mountain trail. Finally I stumbled, twisted my ankle, and fell to my knees. I cried out for help in a desperate voice that still rings in my soul: "I CAN'T DO THIS ANY MORE!" God was immediately present, so profoundly and dramatically that I have had not one moment of doubt about His existence since then. "YOU ARE NOT ALONE," I was told, and so it was.

Many bread crumbs were left for me along the path to CCH. One miracle after another, and always hearing from friends that there was this amazing teacher that I needed to meet. I finally walked into CCH on Steck, a week or so after it opened. It did not seem like a church, but the people looked happy. I don't remember Tim's message from that day, or the music.

What I remember was the period of silence. It was the promise of stillness within that eventually drew me into full participation of the Church. It is the remarkable richness of sitting with people of common intention in deep silence that keeps bringing me back.

And then there were the dreams.

The week after joining the Tenth Man School six years ago I had the first of seven brief but vivid dreams that included only four people: me, Pamela and Michael Begeman, and Mary Anne Best. They seemed so important that I recorded them in my daily journal.

The first four dreams consisted of Pamela trying to show me something. In the first one, she held out a small wooded box. Before I could open it, I awoke. In the next three, she opened a window for me to see through, then she drew a picture for me to look at, and then she opened a door for me to pass through. I woke up from the dreams before I could do any of the things she was offering. In all of these, Michael and Mary Anne seemed to be present as witnesses.

The last three dreams were different. All three started with the four of us standing on a sidewalk looking at a large, multi-story house. It was a house that I had already dreamt about many times in my life, and there had always been an uneasy feeling that there was something very frightening in the attic. I somehow knew that an old woman lived up there, and in the other dreams I had only visited the living room on the first floor.

In the first of this series of dreams, we all walked up the front steps and Pamela took my hand. We slowly walked through the rooms on the first floor, and they were lovely. In the second dream, again Pamela took my hand and led all of us up the front steps and up the stairs to the second floor. Again, we slowly and happily explored the many beautiful rooms.

The third dream started the same way as the others, only this time, we went all the way up to the attic. As we walked in, I saw stacks

of books, thousands of books, and many boxes stacked almost to the ceiling. And in the middle of the room sat an old woman, a woman deeply at peace. We looked at one another, and then I awoke. Knowing that this was a very important message dream, I immediately sat up and began my sit. I was given to understand that this was the future me, the end result of something astonishing that started 20 years ago on that mountain side. Me, brought to spiritual maturity by my willingness to join this unique and powerful community called The Church of Conscious Harmony.

*from Mimi Conroy*

For many years I traveled through life with the truth of who I really was buried deeply in my soul. Busy with productivity and consumption, basic human values were lost to me; dreams of fame and fortune were my self-centered focus. I look back 20 years to get this picture of a woman I hardly recognize today.


The first day I entered this church I began to see myself, not what made me different than everyone else, but how alike we are. As my relationship to this teaching became deeper, so did my relationships with the church community. My inner work was meeting my outer life, and the truth of who I was, was out of the closet. This always before felt too risky for

me, as I was one who kept moving before I was exposed. Now I was learning that my deepest thoughts and questions come from this place of perceived risk. And without my community I cannot truly know myself.

One day I disappointed someone by not showing up as promised, and I saw myself in my friend's pain. I just knew I had gone too far and this friendship was over. I realized at this point my life of leaving was less about going and more about not knowing how to stay.

The next day, feeling awkward, I met my friend and I had the experience of being forgiven and accepted – two people experiencing the miracle of the Holy Spirit. That was the day my loneliness began to transform into the sweetness of belonging.

Bearing my friends, and my friends bearing me, we have moment-by-moment built a community. It was never based on our secrets hidden in unique and special solitude, but hinged on these deep dark secrets coming into the light in the company of others. Then showing up the next day and looking into one another's eyes and knowing we don't get out of here without each other.

So risking these awkward and unsure moments, I have come to value community over productivity. I hardly recognize the person I was those many years ago, and it turns out what I've always thought set me apart, binds me to others. 



The Church of Conscious Harmony  
A Contemplative Christian Community

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

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musicdir@consciusharmony.org  
Sue Young

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childmin@consciusharmony.org  
Jacque Botto, Assistant Children's Director  
Don Hale, Youth Director  
youthdir@consciusharmony.org

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

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

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

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## The Ultimate Expression



*For God so loved the world  
that He gave His only Son,  
so that everybody who believes in Him  
might not perish but might have eternal life.  
For God did not send His Son into the world  
to condemn the world,  
but that the world  
might be saved through Him.*



JOHN 3: 16-17

There is a shrine in Sri Lanka that Thomas Merton visited just before his death and where he received what he describes in his *Asian Journal* as the crowning grace of his Asian trip. He had gone to the east to seek Asian wisdom in order to enhance his contemplative Christian journey. He received at that shrine a remarkable enlightenment experience. He saw epitomized in that work of art the ultimate human achievement and the full realization of enlightenment – the possession of all knowledge in perfect freedom, peace and serenity – captured by the smile of ineffable peace. The smile was not one of indifference, but of utter compassion without emotional involvement. The delicate smile transmits the Buddha's experience of unity to His disciples.

Now let us look at another image: Jesus dying on the cross, his lips contorted in the agony of thirst and suffocation. From those lips comes a cry of almost infinite despair, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?' 'Me!' that is, 'Your Son!' This is the ultimate double-bind: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, experiencing the utmost alienation that anyone could ever experience.

Let us compare these two states ... These are, as far as we know, the states in which each of them died. Which manifestation of God is greater? Who is this God who can be expressed in two completely opposite ways? Each expresses the Ultimate Reality in a way that no other human expression could manifest ... When Divine love enters the human condition ... it becomes total vulnerability. God is present not just in serenity, not just in spiritual achievement; God is also present in failure and the utmost suffering, and He manifests Himself equally in each expression.

This, of course, is not the end of the story. Though Jesus died with the ultimate question still on His lips, He moved into a new and inconceivable reality. He is in unity with the Father and with everything that exists. His gloried humanity shares the Divine attributes. He is present everywhere, in everyone, in everything, and at the heart of all reality. Jesus is the Divine human being through whom everything returns to the Father.

Thomas Keating, *Awakenings*

