



THE MARK

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A Contemplative Christian Community

by Tim Cook

Last month marked the 22nd anniversary of The Church of Conscious Harmony. Our church's name also includes the additional designation: A Contemplative Christian Community. So let's use this anniversary occasion to review the entire concept of contemplation and to see what it is about our church that makes it a contemplative church. For starters, let's see what the dictionary has to say about the word, *contemplation*.

The dictionary defines it like this. Contemplation: noun, the action of looking thoughtfully at something for a long time : *the road is too busy for leisurely contemplation of the scenery*.

- deep reflective thought : *he would retire to his room for study or contemplation*.

- religious meditation.

- (in Christian spirituality) a form of prayer or meditation in which a person seeks to pass beyond mental images and concepts to a direct experience of the divine.

All of our church's activities, classes, gatherings and sacraments are aimed at empowering us to live in constant awareness of God's right-now Presence and at removing all the interior obstacles to accepting His love so that we can live out our

ordinary lives in faith, through becoming receptive to grace.

It was only about 25 years ago that I became aware that there was such a practice as Christian contemplation. I had become familiar with the contemplative practices of Buddhism and Hinduism, and I was very happy and surprised to find this ancient yet vitally alive tradition also within Christianity.

The Christian spiritual journey is a movement in consciousness and a development of our personal identity, our feeling of 'I'. That feeling of our identity has become attached to — identified with — all sorts of exterior images, concepts and conditions. That means that we are always feeling good or bad, safe or at risk, happy or sad, based on the shifting sands of the appearance or form of conditions in the world.

The liberation of our feeling of 'I' is a progressive release — at ever-deepening levels of consciousness — of the repressed emotional debris of our earlier lives. It's kind of like an archeological dig that progressively uncovers earlier and earlier levels of civilization. At bottom, we discover and experience our original, True Selves. When our felt identity returns to that open-

minded, open-hearted state of consciousness, we experience our unity with God. Our self-centered striving ceases and we experience the simple joys of just being alive.

Looking back on our journey, we see that God has been leading us and loving us every step of the way.

The movement and development of our feeling of 'I', from bondage to liberation, is energized by our daily periods of Centering Prayer. During these regular times of communion with God we retire to our inner room, release our attention from thoughts, emotions and sensations and let it come to rest on the simple awareness of God's presence. This lets us relax our self-contraction by releasing our will from the struggle to get everything in our lives in right order. In letting go of our usual preoccupations, we open to God's love and He heals our interior lives, layer by layer.

As we become increasingly practiced at feeling our deepest identity we find the awareness of it coming to consciousness during the other parts of our day, as touches of grace reveal God's love to us, and at the same time shows us the ways we are still habituated to refusing it. These habits of thought and

continued

emotion were part of the old, superficial identity that God is progressively taking from us and replacing...with Himself. We are becoming His, in experience as well as fact.

Our journey to contemplation is supported and sustained by regular, daily Centering Prayer, the sacraments, personal study and by participation in worship, Centering Prayer retreats, classes and community events. In Christ, we are able to let down the emotional barriers that keep us feeling separate from each other and from God, and we discover and live out our spiritual oneness in our community and in the

world. We are becoming the change we wish to see in the world and so are becoming part of the healing of the human family.

The Church of Conscious Harmony, A Contemplative Christian Community, has grown astonishingly deeper in our 22 years of living out our experiment of sharing life in a "monastery without walls." One-by-one we've heard and answered God's call to participate in His life, while letting our old one go. Each of us is discovering, for ourselves, the experience of God that the word, *contemplation*, points to. ☸

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.

31st Guideline



Solitude is not primarily a place but an attitude of total commitment to God. When one belongs completely to God, the sharing of one's life and gifts continually increases.

CCH Bookstore

Year of Mercy

August - Humility

Community Reading
begins July 15
The Complete Fenelon



Living in the Truth
by Michael Casey



Humility of God
A Franciscan Perspective
By Ilia Delio



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Sunday 9:00-10:00am & 11:30am-12:30pm

The True Self Needs Meat to Grow On

by Babara Cook

St. Paul says that when we are spiritually young we need a “milk” diet, but to mature we need a “meat” diet to grow on. That is what we hope to provide here at The Church of Conscious Harmony. It is an offering of substantial spiritual food for people who wish to grow in God’s grace and stature, transformed into what Christ Jesus revealed and Paul described as our “hope of glory.”

That transformation can’t happen without our consent, so we must give our will to it. And it can’t happen without the proper diet of the food of impressions. So we sit in silent prayer each day for at least 40 minutes. We also feed on the impressions that we take in from the study of Fr. Thomas Keating’s book,

Open Mind and Open Heart, and from books on the Work of Inner Christianity.

To be transformed, we also need a community of the faithful to remind us and encourage us and to be there with us during this journey of becoming what we are in Christ. We need the Eucharist to feed us and transform us, and we need to serve because service helps us surrender our false selves. And we need a daily diet of scripture and transformative teachings that guide us and inspire us.

One book that I find rich food in is *The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living*, composed of excerpts from the works of Fr. Keating compiled by Stephanie Iachetta. She has taken powerful quotations from twelve of Fr. Thomas’ books and created

readings for thirty days. Each excerpt is about one paragraph long and each day highlights an accompanying scripture. Tim and I read from it every morning to open our 7am Centering Prayer. Even though I’ve been through the entire book many times, I’m still blown away by the clarity and contemplative insight that Fr. Thomas brings us.

On a recent day he was reminding us that Christ comes down to us and meets us right where we are, just as we are, so that we can become what He is. He is now and always loving us into wholeness. It was just what I needed for spiritual food on that particular day. I highly recommend this rich feast for your daily consumption, too. ☸

SEEDS Our Spiritual Freedom

We do not have to create a conscience for ourselves. We are born with one, and no matter how much we may ignore it, we cannot silence its insistent demand that we do good and avoid evil. No matter how much we may deny our freedom and our moral responsibility, our intellectual soul cries out for a morality and a spiritual freedom without which it knows it cannot be happy.

By Thomas Merton
Originally published in *No Man Is An Island*, p.41-42



Humility

by Eric DeJernett

I affirm... Though He was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied Himself. Phillipians 2:6-7

I pray... Why do nationals and people plot against one another, setting themselves apart and conspiring... They say to themselves, 'We are free of Love's law; humility and service are for others.' The Beloved, who is ever present, can but smile at their foolishness, knowing that one day, they will fall to their knees in regret. Psalm 2

I bought the house I currently live in a couple of years after my divorce. At the time I was a half time single dad with a daughter in kindergarten. I was looking for an older house with character in a good school district. My ex-wife and I had lovingly restored a beautiful 1930's stucco home and I was looking to rebuild my physical environment as I was rebuilding my life after a very difficult period. I mentioned my desire to a friend of mine and he asked me what type of house I was looking for. We were standing in his front yard at the time. I looked around and pointed to the house across the street and told him that I wanted to buy a house like that one. A couple of months later he called me early on a Saturday morning to tell me that there was a "For Sale by Owner" sign in front of the house. After we moved in, I would often say to friends coming over for the first time that "we are about a block and a half up the road on the right. Look for Hansel and Gretel's house and you will find us." Not only does this home resemble the house my ex-wife and I owned, but it also resembles

the home my grandparents in Dallas owned as well as my grandparents in Ft. Worth.

I have a very clear memory of sitting in the dining room of the stucco house while we were in the middle of our divorce. I had not yet moved out, but knew it was coming. I remember having a sense that my life was like a photograph literally being torn to shreds. A life I had worked so hard to create was dying a painful death.

I have been thinking a lot about houses lately. I recently began to think back about the different houses I have lived in since I moved out of a dorm at UT and started to build a life for myself that was independent of my parents.

I remembered the garage apartment overlooking Waller Creek my ex-wife and I lived in while we were going to UT and for several years thereafter. The duplex we bought and renovated. The 1930's stucco house that signaled the success we were having in our careers. Then the West Enfield tutor apartment that came after the divorce and of course the storybook

cottage I still call home. As I thought about these houses I saw how I was focused on the physical aspects of the buildings, the furnishings, the landscaping, the "picture" I had in my mind. The picture as if it were seen from the outside.

Then all of a sudden there was a shift and I started to feel periods of my life in these different houses instead of just seeing the exterior picture. Much like the feeling that comes when the witch enters the story in the familiar Brothers Grimm tales, I felt a rush of emotions come over me. I felt the intense anxiety when my ex-wife and I almost got a divorce while living in the garage apartment. The fear I felt in the duplex as my wife melted down and turned to therapy for help — a process I was fully supportive of as long as it did not include me. The gnawing drive to complete endless renovation projects in the stucco house to keep up the exterior picture I desperately wanted to build as I burned emotional energy instead of feeling it. The sadness I felt when

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friends looked at us and said we were just like Barbie and Ken, how could we be getting a divorce? The empty feeling in the apartment after my mom died, my divorce was final, and I found out firsthand how hard it was to be a single parent. The violence I felt toward my parents, my ex-wife, and eventually me as “my life” fell apart.

It took the complete death of my former life for me to cry out for help, to turn to the process of therapy that I wanted nothing to do with earlier in life, and to open to the teachings of Inner Christianity I was finding through a new church I was attending. The Church of Conscious Harmony helped me move from an unformed meditation practice to the simple yet powerful structure of Centering Prayer and the dismantling of the false self as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating. CCH also introduced me to The Work of Inner Christianity as presented by G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, Dr. Maurice Nicoll and others. The Work offered me practical teachings such as the following excerpt from a commentary by Dr. Nicoll that I could apply to my personal struggle in the present moment:

A man must get to know himself before he can change. And here another illusion comes in. Everyone thinks he knows himself. He is offended if told he does not.... So he remains in the same place, in the same house, and in the same place in his house, in the same 'I's that he takes as himself. Man is given more than he needs, and this is one of the mysteries of life.... He is given more


than he needs for just living his natural life. He is given a far larger house than he uses, or needs to use for the purposes of ordinary life.... He has, in his total given house, unused functions which sometimes, say in moments of great fatigue and stress and illness — are momentarily opened to him. He then passes into another part of his psychological country, or into another room in the house of this being. Notice — it is there already.... What has happened to him is that he has experienced things on another level, in another room. He has been for a moment or two in a room at the top of his house and seen everything quite differently, just as one does from the top of a height. Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, Page 1764

I am now remarried, have added onto the storybook cottage, and my daughter just graduated from high school. I have rebuilt the picture of myself and my family. However, with the help of Centering Prayer and the Work, there is now a willingness to explore more of my house than just the external picture. It is humbling to acknowledge that a pretty picture on the outside does not equate to a pretty picture on the inside. It is humbling to acknowledge that years of therapy, Centering Prayer and study of the Work are only the beginning of dismantling what Fr. Thomas refers to as the false self. It is humbling to acknowledge my utter dependence on God.

In *First Corinthians* Saint Paul is

very clear about Love — it is patient, it is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. At times I feel like my storybook cottage is a microcosmos of the Middle East. It is a psychological country that resembles the tension and strife that goes on between the Israelis and the Palestinians as each member of my household takes a position and stands by it as if it were greater than Love — inhabiting the small rooms in the basement of our being. In my own home, I often fail to practice the great teaching of Saint Paul with those who I love the most.

I have begun to wonder about the potential level of influence each and every one of us has on the world. I understand there is a metaphor in chaos theory known as the “Butterfly Effect” whereby the breeze coming from a butterfly wing in Brazil can affect the trajectory of a tornado in Texas. If this is true, what effect would my choice to occupy the upper floors of my house, those where peace and love prevail, have on the Middle East, or Mexico, or Somalia, or Austin, Texas?

I can see in retrospect that there has been an unconscious attraction toward the storybook cottage of my grandparents...the desire to have a home filled with the love and understanding I felt when I stayed with my grandparents on weekends. But now I have the understanding that the physical structure does not create the internal state. By God's Grace I have been given the tools of Inner Christianity to move out of the basement and into the upper floors of my house. 



The Transfiguration

Suddenly, a voice from the cloud resounded, saying,
'This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.'

Listen not just to His words to which [the apostles]
had been listening when they were on the plain,
but 'listen to *Him*,' the divine person who is speaking to *you*.
Listen to the divine presence that is incarnate in this human being.
Listen to the infinite Silence out of which the incarnate Word
emerges and to which it returns.

As the disciples return to the plain, they take with them,
not the experience of Jesus' glory, which was so consoling,
but something even more valuable: the transformation
of consciousness that is the result of their experience
on the mountain. Through the touch of Jesus
they moved beyond fear and the domination of any emotion
and are now able to live life on the plain in union with God.

The grace of the Transfiguration is not just a vision of glory,
an isolated experience of divine consolation, however exalted.

Its primary purpose is something greater:
to empower us to live in the presence of God
and to see the radiance of that presence in all events,
people, the cosmos, and in ourselves.

Thomas Keating, *Reawakenings*

Such grace is a gift of
Centering Prayer.



August Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Aug 14 8:30am-4pm

\$15, no preregistration required

Bring your own lunch.

Song and Silence

Aug 29 noon-5pm

\$20 preregistration required
lunch included

Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30pm

Aug 3 Sacred Chanting

Aug 17 Gurdjieff Music

Community Workday

Aug 28 9am-12noon

Weekly

Prayer Circle

Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

Wednesdays 12noon

Mid-Week Communion Service

Wednesdays 6-7pm

Introduction to the Work Class

Thursdays 7:30pm

Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service

M-F 7-7:35am in Theosis Chapel




The Work

People are not what they imagine.

I suppose that few of us yet have really thought about how we would care to face the possibility of the whole of our inner psychological life of secret thought and feeling being laid bare to the observation of other people. Here, in our life on earth, this is mercifully hidden from others. But, at the same time, it is individually accessible to each of us. This is the direction of the Work, on its practical side – to see, by direct, uncritical self-observation, what exists in oneself, what thoughts and feelings, and so on, one identifies with. But in self-observation in the Work-sense it is necessary to observe *facts* about oneself. Now most of us so excuse ourselves and are so much under the pleasant and subtle activity of self-justifying, in co-operation with imagination, that we never really register any distinct facts about ourselves. For example, if we are mean, we really do not observe it as a fact. Others may. But we find all sorts of reasons in excuse. Or let us take ourselves from the angle of how we speak unpleasantly about one another. We do not register the fact by direct and real self-observation. We allow it to go on, chiefly because we like it and it is so very easy and if accused of it we probably smile in that terrible way we do at such a time. Why are we so incapable of registering facts about ourselves? One great reason is that imagination of ourselves prevents us. So we cannot *see* anything real, any real facts about ourselves, save very dimly. Our imagination – or state of hypnosis –

prevents any real, direct observation. We imagine we are, so to speak, eagles or lions, or, let us say, respectable and nice people, and cannot see through the mists of self-imagination that we are nothing of the kind. But all these ideas, all these forms of imagination, under which everyone lives, are different examples of 'Kundalini' and the force it exerts on mankind to keep up the state of sleep that characterizes humanity on this earth. People are not what they imagine, nor is anything in life what it pretends to be. Certainly people may begin to see that this is so as they get older – and then, just when this Work is necessary for them – as a rule they become negative and feel frustrated.

You have all heard that the Work teaches us that we are in the power of *Imaginary 'I'* and that this is the source of most of our troubles. This 'I', or this feeling or idea of oneself, is composed of *imagination*. Do not think for a moment that imagination is nothing – “nothing but imagination” – as the saying goes. You have seen what the Work says about imagination. It is the most powerful force acting on mankind. It is a definite and terrible thing, not a “mere nothing”. To say that a person is suffering from imagination is to say that that person is suffering from a very powerful, intractable and dangerous force. 

Pages 309-310, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Dr. Maurice Nicoll. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Introduction to the Work* classes held every Thursday at 7:30 pm at The Church of Conscious Harmony.



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