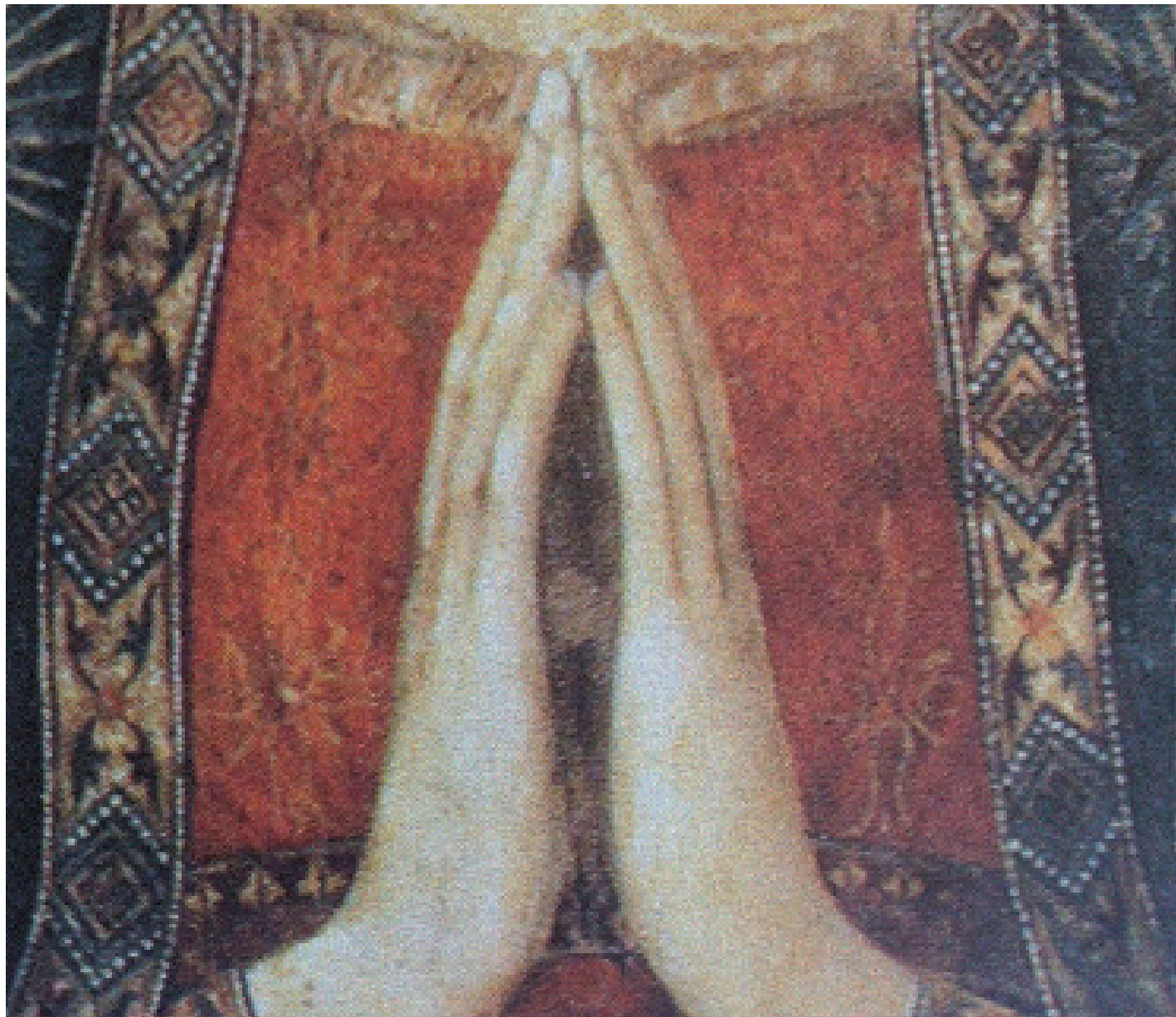


December 2014  
Volume 26  
Number 12



# THE MARK

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



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# The Face of Christ

by Tim Cook

As I begin writing this article, it is November 1, the day of the Feast of All Saints. Halloween was observed yesterday. Thanksgiving is still over three weeks away and Christmas will be celebrated about four weeks after that; yet Christmas merchandise began showing up in some stores and catalogues in September. The arrival of holiday stock in the stores is the trigger that starts the inner percolation of ideas for this annual Christmas article that I am blessed to write for *The Mark*. This year, the images and ideas that are rising within me are a lot different than they have been in the past. I'm seeing more deeply and seriously how Christ confronts the entire basis on which our cultural and social order is founded. And, of course, I'm seeing ever-more deeply, how it confronts me in my life.

With all the anticipatory attention paid to it for about a quarter of the entire year; it is clear that Christmas is a very significant fact in our lives. It may, however, be difficult to see the profound cosmic and personal implications of the face of Christ that was born in human form when it is so covered by such a vast and obscuring cloak of commercialism. Please don't get me wrong; I love the gifting atmosphere of the season; but I also long to experience and share

the deepest personal touch of the Real Christ.

What happened in Bethlehem so long ago is still with us and still celebrated because it inaugurated an irreversible change in the human race. The birth of Jesus was the initiating spark that began the age-long transformational process of the human race; the movement from our human species unevolved identity as *mass-man* into the unique personal particularity of *this* man.

This evolution started becoming starkly clear to me several weeks ago when Barbara and I saw a shocking episode of a wonderful PBS historical series called "The American Experience." It chronicled a shameful episode in the history of our country; a time when an organization of white-hooded, white people wearing white robes bearing the cross insignia terrorized countless fellow-citizens who happened to be born another color. An enormous number of ordinary looking citizens whose God-given unique, personal, particular faces were known by families, friends and communities denied that same unique, personal particularity when they hid their faces behind masks that all looked the same. They had transformed their identities from *this* man into *mass-man*. As faceless, undifferentiated,

mass-man they could engage in barbarism that would have been impossible for them if they had faces. If they had faces they would be accountable.

A couple weeks later the idea really hit me when, again on PBS, this time on "Frontline," we saw men in masks perpetrating evil. This time the masks were black, and this time the events were happening in 2014, but it was the same dark spirit. Faceless men proudly filmed their dark acts in the chaos going on in the middle-east. Proud, though, only as uniformly faceless mass-man. They could not reveal the faces God gave them. That would make them feel accountable.

At the other extreme of human exposure, vulnerability and accountability, we see the clear, unequivocal gaze of the man who was born as the baby Jesus, in Bethlehem, on that long-ago first Christmas. The spiritually alive Christ, Son of God, the Father who is Spirit, was born to bring the unmaskable light of love to a darkened world.

*It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful. 2 Corinthians 4:6*

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He never hid that innocent iconic face behind any mask of any kind; whether political, religious, cultural, commercial or class. His face is the face of Man; the face that all of us were born with. And in refusing to mask it, in refusing to darken its radiant gaze, that face abides eternally providing a mirror for each human being to see her or his own true image reflected in it, our own original face. That same face is born with every baby.

To be able to act in any less-than-fully-human way, we must cover that beautiful face, shut down its radiant light and hide it. In this way we disappear as *this* man and reappear as *mass-man*; learning to live according to mass values and we do not feel accountable. But we don't have to be terrorists to hide behind masks. As we grow and evolve culturally through childhood, teens and young adulthood, we learn to hide our original beauty and light behind the acceptable masks of our culture and our times. We add layer after layer of masks; one for our friends, another for family, one for work, another for sports, red masks or blue masks for politics, masks to hide addictions and certainly masks for or against religion. We may well wonder who we are and which mask or which "face" we present to the world is our true face?

Christ's incarnation into our world gave him a human face in which we can see our true spiritual reflection and realize that none of the faces we copy from culture are our true faces. Our true faces are the light of God shining through our flesh. We are not copies of anything.

Each of us is an original, unique, never-to-be-repeated, particular creation of God, the Father. Christ born in Jesus provides the mirror that reveals our own true face. A particular face that is accountable to God for the life it leads. The masks of mass-man, shared by so many others make us feel accountable only to the group they represent.

To live our own unique, particular lives requires us to know ourselves deeper than our culturally received masks. In the silent depth of our interior lives we discover our own Christ Self, our beauty, our love and our absolute dependence on God, our Father. And we discover the true joy of living our lives accountable to Him, instead of to the ever-changing whims of mass culture. And we discover our true voices and learn to speak His language – Truth that sets us free.

Masked men do not speak with their own voices; the mass speaks through them. They do not desire their actual desire but rather what the culture of the moment says they must desire.

We came into this world unmasked and open. The children we were looked out into the culture around us and took on that culture's reflection. We were imprinted by it. Our faces became like those of the faces we saw around us; faces that themselves bore the imprint of the world's age-long cares and sorrows, handed down from generation to generation like traditions. These "traditions" are all based on the idea that we are separate from God and they are simply untrue.

*continued on page 5*



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# The Advent of Christ

by Barbara Cook

I'm so amazed that Halloween is getting to be almost as big of a celebration as Christmas, at least in the world. Looking back at the Christmases of my past; I see that when I was a child it meant family gatherings, trees, decorations, gifts and the happy and exciting feeling of family togetherness. It was a truly happy and exciting time. Later, as church became more central in our family life, it still mostly revolved around a tree, decorations, Christmas dinner, gifts and then a trip to midnight Mass. There was a lot of family and feasting, but not much about Christ; even though we were Christians. You could safely say we were Christian secularist. We went to church weekly, but that had little to do with our lives.


Christmas really didn't pick up meaning for me until I began my Centering Prayer practice, which created a space for Christ in me – a small, but real, space. The getting and giving were still there, but there was more openness; a soft wondering and deeper receptivity that began about twelve years ago when my friend, Pat Johnson, called me with a request. Pat leads retreats and cooks for them all year round. That

year she was worn-out and needed a retreat herself. She had begun hosting Advent retreats because she knew from experience how much the deep silence of a retreat atmosphere provides a powerful preparation for our souls to prepare to meet Christ. But the only hermitage opening available for her at the Monastery was in December. She had called to see if I would be willing to fill in for her and staff the Advent retreat that year. My beloved Tim was hesitant about me going away during our busiest time of the year, but I felt God calling me and I felt that I had to respond. I knew that when God calls, it doesn't always make sense or fit into our best laid plans; but Tim and I shared a deep knowing that we could trust God's plan for our lives. We knew that we were being taught and stretched.

That first Advent retreat at the Monastery was just the beginning as I was gifted to serve them for the next 4 or 5 years. Those retreats seeded my desire to share the grace of taking time apart to prepare for Christ with our community. And that's how we were inspired to begin hosting our CCH Advent retreats at Cedarbreak in Belton, Texas.

What a gift it is to let go of our hold on the world and its fast-paced Christmas season preparations and sink into prayerful openness, stillness, and wonder. When I go away in December, I don't feel the least bit selfish. I feel my connection with all of God's children, my loved ones, and my community. All my beloveds share the breath of Spirit that I bring home with me. It gives me time to deepen my hunger and thirst for the experience of the Reality of Christ; which goes unnoticed when I'm too busy and distracted. The Advent retreat gives me time apart for deep prayer and reflection and simplicity. Then, my Christmas season is deeply rooted in Christ, which *is* my Christmas; everything that follows is simply whatever unfolds in God's grace.

As each of us observes our personal Advent season, seeing it and intending it as our time for making space for Christ in our lives; however we are led to do it; I am sure that Christmas day and the whole season will be rich and meaningful as, together, we share another year of moving deeper into Christ.

Wishing you a blessed and joy-filled Christmas! 

# A Year in Review: A Sacred World

## Monthly Soundings of Harmony

As we were invited to join in community to move ever deeper together, our intention has been to manifest conscious harmony with all life.

January	The Incarnation
February	The Sanctification of Time
March	Acts of Contrition
April	Devotion
May	Acts of Giving Away
June	The Grace of Nature
July	The Miraculous in Action
August	The Starry Heaven at Night
September	The Sacrament of the Present Moment
October	Vocation
November	Reverence for the Elderly
December	The Unknowable Mystery

There is a communion with God through earth  
 – a sacrament of the world –  
 spreading like a halo round the Eucharist.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*

*All glory to God.*


Previous issues of *The Mark* are available at [consciouharmony.org/monthly\\_newsletter](http://consciouharmony.org/monthly_newsletter) if you would like to review and reflect on these monthly community aims.

Truth was born in Bethlehem in the tiny and helpless form of an innocent child who never learned to hide his face. Throughout his life he was accountable to his true Creator and responsible to the Source of Life for his unique, one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-repeated, particular life. That child bore Man into the world so that each of us could see, in his image; the true, image of our own lives. He was himself, the particular man, and he was through God, all of us, all of mankind, at the very same time through the Mystery of God's Perfect Oneness.

We are not required to wear the world's reflected masks; they are

simply a cultural habit, no more than a reflection. And belonging to God, as we do; we don't need to hide our faces. When we gaze deeply into the Christ Child's face; we may, for the first time, see the reflection of our own true faces shining and beautiful with Christ's Light. He saves the world one particular face at a time.

*All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.*

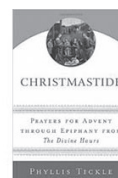
2 Corinthians 3:18 

## CCH Bookstore

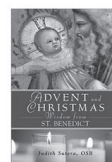
Advent reading suggestions



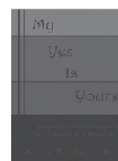
*God Is in the Manger*  
*Reflections on Advent and Christmas*  
 by Dietrich Bonhoeffer



*Christmastide*  
*Prayers for Advent through Epiphany*  
*from The Divine Hours*  
 by Phyllis Tickle



*Advent and Christmas*  
*Wisdom from St. Benedict*  
 by Judith Suter



*My Yes Is Yours*  
*A Contemplative Daily Companion*  
*for Advent and Christmas*  
 by Peter Traben Haas

Bookstore and Library Hours  
 Monday-Friday 9 am-3:30 pm  
 Sunday 9-10 am & 11:30 am-12:30 pm



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*God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good.* Genesis 1:31

# Annual Aim: A Sacred World

## Soundings of Conscious Harmony

### Being Known by the Unknowable Mystery

by Jackie Strashun

*My thoughts  
are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways  
my ways.*

Isaiah 55:8

*Give thanks  
always  
and for everything.  
Amen.*

Ephesians 5:20

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The words *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* ...  
acknowledge the tremendous mystery, the overwhelming mystery,  
the mystery that can't be penetrated, the unknowable mystery.  
At the same time, the Ultimate Mystery is utterly fascinating  
and desirable, and the longing to experience and possess it  
is deeply implanted in human nature. ... We are never quite at peace  
without developing this ultimate relationship ...  
[and] surrendering to the mystery that is not understandable to us,  
but is *determined* to share with us the beauty, goodness, freedom,  
compassion and forgiveness as gratuitous gifts.  
... We thought of ourselves as seeking God [but]  
the Mystery unfolds of itself.

Thomas Keating,  
*The Gift of Life: Death & Dying*,

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It is ironic and even humorous to write about the Unknowable Mystery when the subtle, sacred intimation of God's presence is in the immediate moment. When, ultimately, the best thing is to be aware enough to surrender and just let it roll over me whenever it comes.

Putting the ineffable into words that are meaningful is like putting

fireflies in a bottle to capture the magic of the moment. Better to let the memory live on than to hold onto a bottle of dead, dark bugs. With that  *caveat*, here are some of my recent experiences with the Unknowable Mystery.

#### **Looking for Stillness in my Practice**

I find myself turning again and

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again to my sacred word. I just can't sink down deep enough to escape the layers of noisy thoughts this morning in my period of Centering Prayer. I feel exasperated, yet grateful for this prayer. Finally, I silently scream, "Help God! I'm drowning!" I am very present now, and suddenly Holy Presence surrounds me like a warm, loving shroud. I sink down into it in dark acceptance and surrender. All is quiet and still for the rest of my sit.

I finish my pre-dawn practice, sacred readings and my sit. A familiar peace and stillness caresses me. While the morning's liturgy still deeply resonates and moves inside me, I go out for a walk under the stars. I look up at a silent, clear, cool, starry Autumn sky. Jupiter, Orion and Sirius welcome me and I respond, "Are you my mother?" to one particularly dazzling star, but no answer comes back. My shoes crunch as I walk briskly ahead. The cool breeze is so welcome on my skin. The sounds of night bugs lightly mix with distant early morning traffic. An owl with a haunting "who" joins me from a short distance off. I "who" back, feeling light and joyful just to be alive and in His company. I smile, knowing peace and gratitude for the grace of bodily sensation. Once home, I immediately pull out paper and pen to record the amazing experience of Presence on my walk. I watch my mind take hold of it; already changing it, here and there. Add color here? How about more adjectives there? Wow! The mind converts things into other things, so

fast. My day has begun.

### **In Pondering the Liturgy through *Lectio Divina***

I know that when I ask for His help, God immediately comes to my aid through the prayer method of *lectio divina*, Latin for "divine reading" of sacred scripture. When I read the liturgy with this method, even just a paragraph or a few words, God clearly replies to my silent concerns in an intimate way I can understand and accept, bringing me peace. The mystery is that God's response to the same liturgy falls in me differently from one period of *lectio divina* to the next, depending upon my changing state of mind and heart. In these moments I perceive our relationship as alive and growing, imparting the undeniable experience of being heard and loved, as God's Word is always responsive to my present need. The following is a recent *lectio divina* experience:

*"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival."* Luke 12:35-38

If I am fully awake in this moment, I discern God's loving presence, subtly but certainly, as I catch a poignant word or phrase from scripture, the radiant light from the eyes of another, or even the simple wag of my dog's loving tail. In contrast, God is not found in my imagination about tomorrow or my self-absorbed story about yesterday.

### **In Failure**

Sometimes I try too hard to

"do" the spiritual path. Mercy and grace are gifts – God's plan does not reward the doers for their special efforts (ask Martha). One day everything I tried to sense God's magic, just fell with a dull thud. Nothing. Alone on my way to church for Gurdjieff Movements and the Work of Inner Christianity class that evening, I felt dark and down, emotionally. It was very quiet and still and somehow sad. I felt tired and yet I had not really done anything to be tired. "Maybe I'm not cut out for this path, after all," a little voice said in me. I found myself wanting to give up (and I'm not a quitter). I spoke aloud to the silence with a loud voice, "I surrender! I really can't do anything!" and I meant what I said. For once, I got it. All went very quiet and still. Nothing was spoken, inside or outside for the rest of my drive to church.

It was dusk and the sun was starting to go down. I put on my ballet shoes and joined my friends for the movements. We were given two very quiet movements where the arms, legs, and head all mark the passage of time, mimicking the movement of a clock with our arms ticking off our lives. I suddenly found myself crying while still moving through this sacred time together with my friends. It was really just me and God in this intimate feeling; but through my body in unison with my friends, it was all of us collectively experiencing God in the room. In the mystical process, some dark thing deep inside

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me was released; was taken out of me and thrown away. I have no idea of how, what or why. I knew not to inquire. As I walked from there towards the sanctuary afterwards, I felt much lighter and even younger than when I had arrived. My eyes met the setting sun – dark red, warm and familiar. My heart was pierced with its color and the peace of God’s reliable clock. I then joined my beloved fellow students to study together the mystery of the Work of Inner Christianity. We witness to one another’s sweet smallness and God’s loving greatness. I knew that all was well because it was. I wish to remember the gift of surrender to God. Magic comes from that starting place.

### **In Art, Music and the Sacrament of Marriage**

The Mystery came to me intertwining a piece of music and a piece of art, both of which have touched me deeply since the early days of my first marriage. As I was getting ready to leave home for work one morning, the radio began playing one of my favorite classical pieces – Ravel’s “Bolero” with its slow, low start, creating the memorable sensation of an approaching parade. I was moved in reverie to stop, sit down and just listen to this beloved old friend of mine that was stirring up both good and sad memories and associations. As the music gradually built up toward its crescendo, I looked up and my eyes caught a

piece of modern art hung above our living room fire place called “Fire Dance” by Tobias. It depicts an adult couple dancing around a blazing, open fire with flames and smoke bellowing upwards. At the top, just above the smoke, are two very young children playing together on some kind of bike. This picture was the fond purchase of my first husband and mine now 30 years ago when we were struggling with infertility. We both wished for children, and there had been mutual suffering in our failure to have children up to the time we found and bought this poignant painting. In that first view of the art that morning, I saw what I had always seen before – the couple was imagining their yet-to-be-born children, joyfully hopeful in their life dance together. A happy memory of the early days of that marriage, which later fell apart. So some sadness then came in, too. As “Bolero” increased in volume as the parade gets closer, I kept studying the painting and suddenly noticed a completely different scene. I still saw me as the wife, but now I saw Jack, my second husband, as the man with whom I was dancing. Jack is my spiritual partner; something I never had nor could I have had in the first part of life and in my first marriage, through no fault of mine nor of my first husband – it was just what it was. And the children above our heads suddenly were not our children, but instead our very young selves as children – Jack and

me, turning back again as Christ admonished we are to do to enter heaven together as children – young, innocent essences, dancing freely in their own way just as their adult selves were dancing below them. It was an accurate depiction of what I knew was true – Jack and I were drawn together in love and to love and support one another’s journey as we return to our Father’s house in this second, mature stage of life. And oh the joy that growing bond brings as our respective spiritual paths evolve, side-by-side! Then the picture was transformed yet again in the next moment. I then saw it had been, was, and it would always be through these relationships, all of them, my own individual dance with my loving God. He was always playing all the other parts in our eternal dance of joy together. The Mystery so big and so loving that it had to come down to my relative nothingness and smallness, allowing me to be in relationship with Him by being in loving relationship with all other creatures – just like me – to love me enough to bring me into His wholeness. By now, the musical parade had reached me, the trumpets were blaring and I was crying with the wonder of it all.

### **Meeting God in the Silence on Retreat**

I arrive at the one-day centering prayer retreat thirsty for immersion in God’s first word, Silence. My aim is to jump



in and to sink down deeply and it happens in the very first sit. I am in a warm sea of love and stillness. Each period of prayer draws me down further. I have returned to home at the center of my being. The silence, utter calm, follows me all day long as I walk the grounds, eat my lunch, find myself in nature, experience *lectio divina* and share with my fellow retreatants what God spoke to me in the day's liturgy. I feel love for the circle, even though we make almost no eye contact and virtually no known communication, one-to-the-other. This sense of calm is a persisting state that is familiar in retreat, but only comes and goes in regular life. Nature is somehow more vibrant in this state. I look at sunflowers that look back at me; I lay in the grass for suspended time and watch birds circling overhead, catching thermals on this lush, blue sky day. We are all suspended in God's timeless time. I think of my fellow retreatants as I watch the circling birds – we are both in community but also doing our own things – making our own patterns of relationship with our Creator. Everything seems clear

and simple in this suspended state of God Awareness. I am centered with God and yet function; indeed my awareness is heightened. I walk in gratitude.

What would it be like to live from this silent womb of still peace? I hold this pondering at the end of the day as I leave church and return to the noisy world out there.

### The Mystery Revealed

By intentionally observing my relationship with the Unknowable Mystery, I noticed a magical quality in my life that wasn't there before. I discovered that if you do not capture the experience in writing, the memory fades or changes the impressions so fast that it quickly evaporates, as if it never happened – but it did.

In describing the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, Fr. Thomas Keating says "Everything about God is wonderful but completely beyond articulation. The experience of God beyond thinking is all experience at once and much more. God is always a surprise, intimate beyond belief, more personal than we are to ourselves." He also said, "God is beyond the beyond the beyond and yet closer than our own sense of being." Ahhhhhh. That's it! ☺

## Multi-Day Centering Prayer Retreats at Cedarbrake

Jan 21-25	5-day	Renewal	\$425
Feb 27-Mar 8	10-day	Lenten	\$825

Call the office to register.

## DECEMBER CALENDAR

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

### SPECIAL EVENTS

- Dec 13 - One Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
8:30 am-4:30 pm  
\$15 Bring a pot luck dish to share.
- Dec 18 - "The Glorious Impossible" 7 pm
- Dec 24 - Christmas Service 6 pm  
with Eucharist and candle lighting
- Dec 31 - New Years Eve Service  
8:30 pm - 12:15 am See website for details

### MONTHLY

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sundays  
Bring non-perishable items for Caritas
- Dec 6  
Community Work Day
- Dec 16  
Gurdjieff Music 7:30-8:30 pm

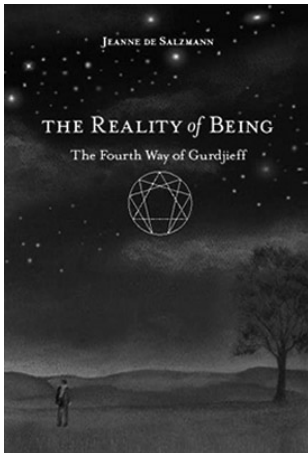
### WEEKLY

- Sundays  
Lectio Divina 8-9 am  
Worship Service 10-11:30 am  
Youth Program 10-11:30 am  
Fellowship 11:30 am-noon
- Wednesdays  
Prayer Circle 9:15-10 am  
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm  
Communion Service 6-7 pm
- Thursdays  
Work of Inner Christianity Class 7:30-9 pm
- Fridays  
Devotional Service 7:30-8:45 pm

### DAILY

- Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am  
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available  
through the Bookstore and online at  
[www.consciousharmony.org](http://www.consciousharmony.org)



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## The Work of Inner Christianity

*My Father is still working, and I also am working.* John 5:17

### Something Entirely New

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A creation is the appearance of something entirely new. It is not a projection of what already exists, coming from memory, not a repetition of something known. Creation only appears in front of the unknown. It is difficult, however, to act from the unknown, to accept not knowing. It seems that I am deprived of the capacity to “do,” that is, to prove that my ordinary “I” is something important, superior to others.

I seek to distract myself from this feeling of not knowing. I search my memory for something that helps me understand. But when I can no longer escape not knowing, when I face this fact as it is and no longer try to give it a meaning that suits me, then I am no longer separated in my ordinary “I,” and something new is created. This fact is truth, and truth cannot be translated. A relation appears, and this relation is an act of creation. In the face of what is unknown, what is not understood, my mind becomes silent, and in this

silence I discover what is true. In the very act of seeing, there is an act of creation. To see without thought is the discovery of reality.

Under the laws, a real action is determined by two poles: the void from which it comes, and the energy and freedom of its movement. In an act of creation, the movement of interiorizing precedes the movement of exteriorization. In order for the movement inward to proceed, there must be a place that is free and felt like a “void”—void of my ego. Here is a world of finer vibrations, which can be penetrated through sensation. Sensation is the perception of these vibrations. I feel the fineness of the sensation in a state of immobility where there is no tension in my body, and I feel the fineness of the psyche when the thought becomes passive, simply a witness that registers what happens. At this moment a certain sensation of existing appears, a potential life without movement. If this sensation is perceived for even a fraction of a second, it is

enough to know what happens at the moment when the “immobile” becomes “mobile,” that is, at the first spontaneous vibration. This pervading sensation of existing has its own taste and brings a certainty that erases all doubt. It is the imperative return from nonbeing toward Being. The inconceivable is alive ... until the moment I realize this and out of fear of losing it, I give it a name and a form, and the sensation fades away.

In ordinary life we can assemble and construct with elements of the known. But in order to create, it is necessary to be liberated by voluntary death, the death of the ego. Creative vision only belongs to one who dares to look into the depths of himself as far as the void, a matrix created by the constant movement of interiorizing and manifesting in which one is face-to-face with oneself. We are the calm center of the whirlwind of life, and the inner life is the only good. Then everything is done without attachment, as though we

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## 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

### 5<sup>th</sup> Guideline



Original sin is not the result of personal wrongdoing on our part.

Still, it causes a pervasive feeling of alienation from God, from other people and from the true Self.

The cultural consequences of these alienations are instilled in us from earliest childhood and passed on from one generation to the next.

The urgent need to escape from the profound insecurity of this situation gives rise, when unchecked, to insatiable desires for pleasure, possession, and power.

On the social level, it gives rise to violence, war, and institutional injustice.

have nothing to do, living wherever it is necessary. Things arise by themselves brought by the current of life.

When we have a thinking that is truly free, we can face life in a new way, including challenges like disease and poverty. Instead of approaching issues as separate from the totality of existence, we can see them as particular aspects of the whole. If I understand the totality of existence in a connected world, I will see that in order to transform things outside me, I have to transform myself. As I approach a better quality in myself, I wish to participate in something higher in this one world. Then I can accept as a fact this life in which I find myself, voluntarily assuming the role given to me within it. I understand my part in the struggle within the totality of existence. ☉

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being – The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*, pages 275-277. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the Work of Inner Christianity class held every Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

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## SEEDS

The contemplative life has nothing to tell you except to reassure you and say that if you dare to penetrate your own silence and dare to advance without fear into the solitude of your own heart, and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through you and with you, then you will truly recover the light and the capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations because it is too close to be explained: it is the intimate union in the depths of your own heart, of God's spirit and your own secret inmost self, so that you and He are in truth One Spirit.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, page 22.



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"To everyone who received Him,  
He gave power to become  
the children of God,"  
that is, to know their Divine Source . . .  
Now is the time when the whole  
of the divine mercy is available.  
Now is the time to risk further growth . . .  
The divine action may turn  
our lives upside down . . .  
Readiness for any eventuality  
is the attitude of one who has entered  
into the freedom of the Gospel . . .  
Our inmost being opens.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

## The Grace of Christmas

*The true light, which enlightens everyone,  
was coming into the world.  
He was in the world,  
and the world came to be through Him,  
but the world did not know Him.  
He came to what was His own,  
but His own people did not accept Him.  
To those who did accept Him,  
He gave power to become children of God  
to those who believe in His name,  
who were born not by natural generation  
nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.  
And the Word became flesh  
and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:1-14