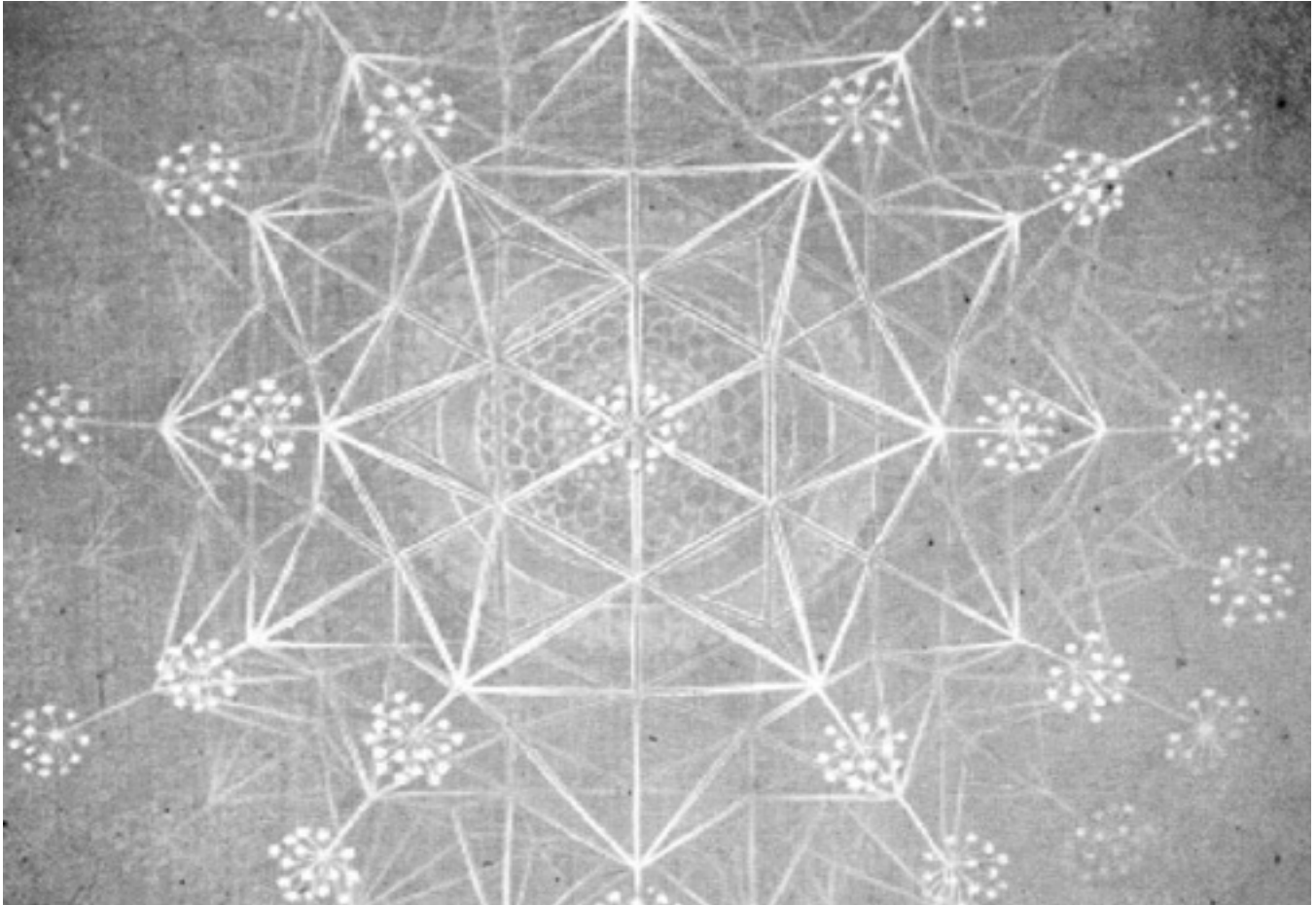




THE MARK

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The Quiet Grace of Seva

by Tim Cook

The first silent retreat I ever attended was at Lama with Ram Dass. The brochure that listed Lama's retreats for that year described it as a karma yoga retreat and it sounded like it was right up my alley. I didn't really know what karma yoga was; but I would have gone to practically anything that would have given me two weeks in the company of my beloved benefactor Ram Dass. I had been deeply touched, heart-opened, by reading his world-changing book, *Remember Be Here Now*, 10 years before, and had since managed to attend several of his amazing, spirit overflowing, evening gatherings.

At our first retreat meeting, Ram Dass explained karma yoga. It originates in the Bhagavad Gita, the ancient holy books of India and it invites spiritual aspirants to come to union with God through selfless action. This action, though, is done without any attachment to the outcome or fruit of the action. The practitioners dedicate themselves to feeling the right now presence of God and perform all of what otherwise would seem like

tasks, as prayers instead. Prayerfully performing specific duties then gradually purifies the devotees mind.

I was then assigned to carry large rocks and to build a retaining wall near the kitchen. Since we were silent; I could not avoid noticing the resentful inner talk in my mind, ... "I paid a lot to come here; I shouldn't have to carry their damn rocks ... my back is screaming in pain ... how much longer are we gonna have to do this crap ... this is slave labor ... I feel like leaving ... yeah, that's it, yeah, yeah I'm leaving tonight after everyone's asleep and I won't be seen ..."

My action was not selfless. It was not free of attachment. It was very much about getting something done and getting the effort over with. My action was not prayerful and I could not feel the presence of God.

Was I a failure? No I was simply a beginner. And nearly everyone begins karma yoga by seeing something similar; a goal-oriented, merit seeking, resentful, judging, egoic mind. By the end of the retreat the promised purification

of the mind had thankfully begun. Things were quieter within and I was even beginning to feel the quiet joy that touches our hearts when our awareness moves beyond self interest.

On my first pilgrimage to India I was guided to the Gobind Sadan Ashram in Delhi where I met Maharaji, Baba Virsa Singh, a great and holy Sikh guru who invited me to stay with him and immediately gave me an assignment to serve the Ashram by carrying huge rocks to build a wall. I took my place in a long line of men and women who were carrying large rocks balanced on pads on their heads. Most of them were a lot smaller than me and many of the women looked like they weighed less than 80 pounds. They were all carrying very heavy rocks. I tried desperately to keep up but I couldn't come near to the weight the little ladies in their bright saris were toting with apparent ease. The language barrier imposed silence on me as I worked in the hot Indian sun. So once again the outer silence made it impossible to avoid noticing

the inner talk in my mind. It was somewhat more elevated than the inner talk I'd experienced at Lama. It was no longer resentful because I felt grateful to be serving such an important spiritual center. The inner talk was now competitive ...

"I can't let those little ladies carry more than me ... I hope Maharaji doesn't see my smaller rocks ... I am exhausted but I can't take a rest if the ladies don't."

This time I felt happy to be doing it but I wanted to be seen as the best. I was still not selfless and free of attachment but I was feeling God's presence and felt happy to be serving.

Years later came another pilgrimage, this time with Barbara, to my first spiritual home, Haidiakhan Ashram on the headwaters of the mighty, roaring Gautama Ganga River in the Himalayan foothills of Northern India. There karma yoga is a way of life. Babaji used to teach other forms of yoga but he often said that in these dark times only karma yoga will bring us to the realization of our union with God in the

present moment. Our assignment was rocks again; this time to build a 150 yard aqueduct from the river to the ashram gardens. Building this aqueduct was an annual project because it washed away every year with the spring floods. It looked like an impossible job but about 30 of us finished it in a little less than a week. What amazed me, though, was not that we actually got it done, but that my mind had really been clearly changed by the intervening years of practicing karma yoga. I felt quiet joy and God's presence during the entire time we worked at what would otherwise been a difficult and burdensome job.

When we founded the The Church of Conscious Harmony as a "five year experiment in Christian community," Barb and I were certain that we wanted to have elements of what we had learned in ashram life as basic attitudes for life in our new community. We call it "seva" here; but it means exactly the same thing as karma yoga, volunteer work selflessly offered up to God in service to the community.

We have several seva groups here at CCH and they serve the church on a rotating basis. They are the folks who get here at 7AM on Sunday morning to prepare the church for worship. The people on seva duty probably won't be obvious if you don't know who they are; because they won't be calling attention to themselves. They will be keeping their own attention in their hearts while doing their work; prayerfully aware of God's presence. Although they are trained to be friendly and welcoming they are also trained to work from a deeply silent and intentional personal consciousness. You won't hear them mechanically making small talk. They know that there will be plenty of time for social bonding after church. Seva groups do so much more than the physical tasks of setting up the church. Their most important role is to set the tone, the silent, present, spiritual tone that will be the welcoming, silent atmosphere that will greet and calm the rest of our community as they arrive for worship.

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The Welcoming Prayer

by Barbara Cook

In 1988 I read *Open Mind, Open Heart*, a book by Father Thomas Keating that changed my life. It led me to attend an introductory workshop on Centering Prayer given by Fr. Keating and to begin a daily practice of this transformative prayer. I had already been meditating with a method given to me by my Indian teacher of 8 years. In essence, Centering Prayer was not too different from my already established practice, but it proved to be the beginning of a quantum leap in my spiritual journey. The difference came from the fact that Centering Prayer is based on our ever-deepening relationship with Christ, who is experienced in a present and personal way. It made sense of my whole journey; it felt like I had come home.


The second biggest boon that came from that relationship began when Fr. Keating introduced us to the practice of the Welcoming Prayer. Although it's taught differently now, I learned the prayer like this,

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Today, I welcome everything that comes to me because I know it is here for my healing. I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations and conditions. I let go of my desire for power and control; I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure. I let go of my desire for survival. I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.

This is the “walking around during the day” part of Centering Prayer. As Father Thomas says so beautifully, when we learn to say yes to God, our deep healing begins. The practice of opening to God's love in Centering Prayer and then consenting to God in everything allows us to see for ourselves that everything that happens to us is there for our healing. We simply say “Yes!” to all of it. The Welcoming Prayer is agreeing with God's work in us, even before it happens. It is also an agreement to invite the Holy Spirit in to dismantle the three energy centers, formed at an

early age, that make up the false self. Those are the centers that we operate from when we feel separate from God and His goodness, but they can never work. They operate from an illusion of negation of the already present presence of God.

In seeing that the false self was truly operating for its own needs and couldn't care less about love or God or anyone else, I realized that I needed real help in getting free of its influence. I wholeheartedly asked for help and prayed the Welcoming Prayer every morning. Soon I began to see that God was doing a great job of loving me into wholeness in both the silence of Centering Prayer and in the welcoming of everything in my “walking around” state. My beloved husband Tim said that it's one of the best things I've ever done!

This is the month of our six-day “Welcoming Prayer” retreat at Cedarbrake with Mary Dwyer. I invite all of us to join in learning and using the Welcoming Prayer. Practice it in your daily life - you will like it! 

The Quiet Grace of Seva continued

There are lots and lots of places where we go to meet and greet our friends. Most of those places are likely to have quite a bit of jovial noise and a bit of loud laughter. We were much like that in the early years of our church, but now we don't usually have much chatter at CCH. Over and over again newcomers and visitors comment on the spiritual atmosphere they feel as they step onto our campus. That is because our 25 year tradition of silent, welcoming atmosphere has been faithfully passed down through the years from seva group to seva group. With their quietly dignified, prayerfully intentional service they

sustain, preserve and pass down to the future our church's most precious and rare gift, a place of stillness and silent presence that opens us up and makes us available to the silent touch of the Living God.

Seva sets the tone for our worship. Without a doubt the people doing seva are serving the entire community but they are also participating in purifying their own minds. If you haven't joined a seva group, now is a great time. You don't even need to be a member of the church; just willing to learn to serve with inner stillness and enjoy the grace of a quiet mind. ☯

Participate. Serve. Grow. Transform.

If you are interested in joining a Sunday Seva team, please call or email the church office. Participation on a team entails serving Sunday morning once every five weeks, from 7 a.m.-noon.

Through selfless service, you can meet more people in the CCH community, understand more about the church, and be open to your own growth and transformation.

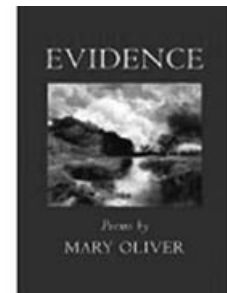
All are welcome!

CCH Bookstore

Summer Reading

Books of poems by Mary Oliver

Why I Wake Early
American Primitive
Thirst
Evidence

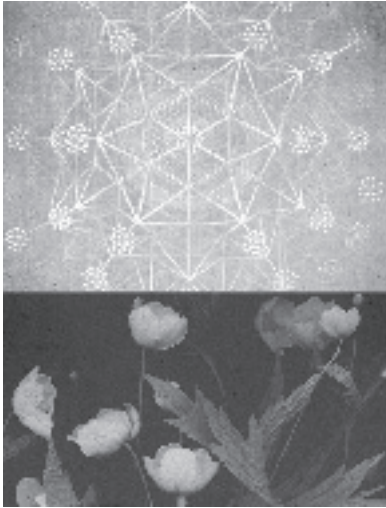


Summer –
A Spiritual Biography of the Season



This collection of powerful, stirring pieces from a wealth of sources invites us all to fully experience the rich and bountiful spirituality of summer.

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



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

Annual Aim: A Sacred World

The Grace of Nature by Kathryn Nichols

When despair grows in me
and I awake in the middle of the night
at the least sound in fear of what my
life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood
drake rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought of grief.
I come into the presence of still water
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light.
For a time I rest in the grace
of the world, and am free.
Wendell Berry, Collected Poems

Nature itself is graced ...
the trees, the grass –
everything is emerging out of God.
Thomas Keating, Spiritual Journey Video
Series #28,
Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit

*The earth is the Lord's and all it holds,
the world and those who dwell in it.*

Psalms 24:1

For as long as I can remember, I preferred outdoors to indoors. Childhood memories include playing in the creek behind our house, climbing trees, collecting rocks, and exploring the “woods” at the end of the subdivision that seemed like a big adventure to little kids. I am grateful to have grown up in a time when parents let their kids be “free range.” I don't remember that I thought about God being there with me or even noticed feeling grateful for the amazing world God created as I do now. I do know that I treasured my time in the “wildest” parts of my city neighborhood. I just felt joy to be out in nature.

I love traveling to places different from where I live, experiencing plants, animals and landscapes I've not seen before. I am in wonder at the diversity of our planet, from giant sequoias to tiny flowering lichen. In my young adulthood, I gravitated

toward the wild places of North America and became a backpacking enthusiast. Hiking allows me to slow down from a driver's perspective to a walker's perspective, and I see things I don't see at 60 mph. It might be leaf-cutter ants, wild strawberries, the opening to a critter's home, or the sun on colored rock bluffs. On trails in the mountains, I gain a different perspective of my world as I climb higher. I come around a bend and a vista opens up. I can see for miles, and it feels like God has graced me with this glimpse of the vastness of creation.

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

From my mountain views, I share God's view that it is very good.

In reflecting on the importance of my era of backpacking, I realize it represents aspects of my spiritual

journey. To consciously pack, I had to learn from my past trips' mistakes what was important and what could be left behind. Backpacking required me to learn self-sufficiency, something my personality really needed to develop. Food always tastes better on a backpacking trip; it's supporting the body for its activities; it's not eating to excess or for comfort or distraction. It's like doing the next needed thing.

I relish the experience of sleeping out in nature away from cities. It is an experience of oneness with what is all around – sounds of wind and animals, or simply immense quiet. I am being in the weather and the temperature of the moment without needing to change 'what is.' I might notice my preferences to be warmer or drier but I can accept what I cannot change. Oh how I wish to be able to do that as easily when I'm in the midst of daily living.

My love of nature led me to make efforts to be a conscious steward of the earth as so many Bible citations tell us to do.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15.

I strive to minimize my consumption of resources, recycle, not pollute, and care for the plants and animals in my charge. In my job, I am blessed to work protecting special places and providing trails for

people to enjoy them. Stewardship is an on-going aim for me. In my wish to minimize my footprint on the earth, I call on the Twelve Step prayer to help me.

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

In our current Western culture, a love of creation and a strong wish to care for it can just as easily bring about pain as it can joy and wonder. The trouble with loving things – including people and the natural world – is that we suffer when we lose them or they change. I have lived for many years on the outskirts of Austin where my drive to and from home blessed me with pastoral views. Then one day, trees are cleared to make way for a road or a subdivision. Such occurrences never fail to elicit emotional responses in me. Through the offerings in our church community, I have engaged in practicing the tools of the Work of Inner Christianity as taught in the class offered on Thursday evenings. I am learning that I can do Work around the way I take in impressions, observing the way I think and feel. When faced with an image of several-hundred-year-old Live Oak trees lying chopped to the ground next to a road construction project, I find my automatic responses tend to be sadness and anger. One practice that helps me with the sadness is to allow

myself to feel it, to grieve for the loss, and then notice if I can open myself to love again. I imagine that God suffers at the destruction of our natural world and maybe I am practicing bearing this immediate loss on behalf of the global community that shares the experience of their natural resources degrading.

The other emotion, anger, takes me away from love even more than sadness. I observe that it's anger toward the "people" who did this. For much of my life, I allowed my love of the environment to create a world of "us" and "them," but I no longer want to live with a hardened heart. Several of the psychological tools of the Work have proved useful for me when I find I'm holding onto anger toward the other. One is when I look to find where I am doing what I accuse the other of doing. I realize I am driving on this road that wasn't there at an earlier point in time; I am living in a house in a subdivision that wasn't always there. I recognize there are people who see the trails I help build as destructive of the natural environment. There is also the Work tool that asks us to imagine seeing from another's point of view. I can imagine the developer thinking he's making people happy by providing homes; the highway engineer thinking he's helping people, even me, get where they want to go safely. I doubt any of them are thinking "I sure like to

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Annual Aim continued

chop down ancient trees!”

My love of the natural world calls me to take in the magnitude of the destruction of our earth’s ecosystems. As Paul says in Romans 8:22,


We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Climate change, exploding population growth, and the consumption of the earth’s limited resources are undeniable facts that impact all species, not just humans. I wonder what is my role as a Christian. I realize that holding on to fear, judgment, anger and blame of certain institutions doesn’t help my disposition be loving nor does it solve the problems. What if, I wonder, it might even hold problems in place. Even worse would be if I allow myself to feel hopeless and apathetic. I believe God meant for us to join Him as co-creators. My prayer is for guidance to see where I can partner with God to make a difference in saving our planet beyond my immediate surroundings, in the global world. My part may be donating money, signing a petition, voting, or helping protect places children can experience, where they can grow to love nature and become the next generation of environmental problem solvers. My discernment is to know when it’s not my task, and

then I need to give it up to God and ask Him to surprise me by showing how those situations that cause me angst and grief are going to be fixed.

In the meantime, I wish to release any negative emotions I have about our world’s situation. I recall the axiom “Mother Nature bats last” as a hopeful thought. I ponder how solutions in nature may occur in God’s time, not mine. The God in whom I have faith is a loving God who loves the created world, including our little planet in its tiny place in the universe. God said to Noah,

I will remember my promise to you and to all other living creatures. Never again will I let floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the sky, I will always remember the promise that I have made to every living creature. Genesis 9:15-16

I have an owl box that I can see from my kitchen window. For most of the last five years, a screech owl comes to live there from fall to spring. My granddaughter and I named the owl together. She picked the name Rainbow and I picked the name Grace. On a daily basis during the season, I look out to see if Rainbow Grace is perched in the window of the box. Whether I see her or not, I am grateful that God has graced me with the blessings of other species and all of nature. 



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A Contemplative Christian Community

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This is Holy Ground

For most of us, entering the Church of Conscious Harmony offers a gentle sense that something is different here. There is a peaceful, private and sanctuary feeling that begins at the entrances. What is this? This is holy ground. Here are some of the ways it is expressed.

Beginning with the architectural design for our church, the plan had several key components that contribute to the “special feeling” we enjoy. One was to create a campus that “worked” with the natural contour and character of the land, rather than to machine out the hillside in an invasive way. The church was intentionally designed to maintain a natural look with a hill country retreat center ambiance, in support of our contemplative interests ... for us to feel comforted and at peace so that we may welcome a practice of going to our inner room to pray.

One of the first examples of this is the inscriptions on the tiles on the Paths of Intention that connect each parking lot to the campus. The tiles were sponsored

and selected by members of the community. We are encouraged to walk slowly, whether coming or leaving, in a contemplative way and allow one inscription to make a special connection in our awareness. It is a joy to engage with God in this way, inviting God to show us a message that we need to receive.

The gardens are substantially cared for as a part of the monthly Saturday community workday. From mulching, pruning, shaping and bed weeding, it is the intention of the community that graces us with the landscape upkeep that we enjoy as an expression of the natural beauty here. It is the same for much of the cleanliness we enjoy here. We can praise our seva groups for this. They arrive at 7 a.m. on Sundays and begin with prayer before sweeping, cleaning and preparing to welcome the community for prayer, fellowship, study and worship.

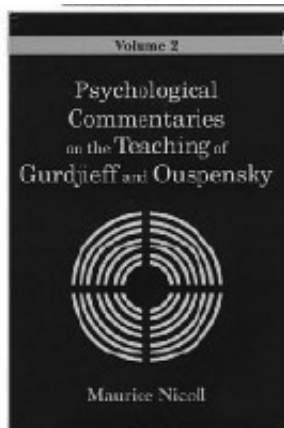
The church is also blessed with special places for God to be revealed through nature mysticism. We have a professionally designed and

constructed trail system. These were designed for the specific intent of use for contemplative walking and praying. Along the trails there are various spurs with chairs for private sitting. Some overlook various parts of the wooded slopes. Other sitting areas are near the tributaries that feed Barton Creek. Trail maps are found in the Fellowship Hall at the information shelf.

Along a trail walk, you may come upon a labyrinth that is used with some of the lessons and activities of the Harmony Youth program. It is in a very private location and offers a unique pattern for a contemplative walk with God, in wonder or in prayer. All in the community are welcome to enjoy it.

As we give special attention to the ways God blesses us in nature, please join in extending a prayer of thanksgiving and well being for all who have contributed to the church we have today. This is holy ground. All are welcome. ☸

Adapted from “Grounds and Facilities” by Donald Genung, July 2013, *The Mark*.



The Work of Inner Christianity

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

From the Esoteric Point of View

A man is born capable of an inner development. This is what the Work teaches. For this reason he has earth and heaven in him. If he were only earth he would be incapable of any inner development. To be created a self-developing organism you must learn that you have in you by creation a higher possible state of yourself. For example an egg is born with a possibility of becoming a bird. It therefore has an earth and a heaven contained in its beginning. A seed, an acorn, etc. is in the same position. Man can remain earth, in which case he serves nature. But to repeat the language of the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.” If you imagine that Genesis is about the creation of the world, the solar system, you are making a great mistake. Esoteric literature invariably deals with Man himself and his possibilities. Esoteric science deals with the Man himself and the Man in himself and with what he can become, and with what his meaning is. Ordinary science deals with the external world and the nature of its structure and so on. Genesis is an esoteric book, not a scientific book, and, since esotericism deals with Man and his possibilities, when it says that “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” it refers to

Man, it refers to this egg, this acorn, this seed, which is created with the possibility of reaching a higher level of development. The lower level is called earth, the higher level is called heaven. An acorn taken by itself is at the level of earth, but when by successive stages it dies to itself and eventually becomes an oak, it attains heaven—i.e. the higher development of itself. But in the beginning the acorn was created with its earth and its heaven, its lower level and its higher level. Now you know that the earth of a man must be filled with thoughts, ideas, emotions, affections, conceptions, before a man can reach a higher level of himself. All these are represented by physical objects—e.g. Man can reach in the stage of his inner development to what is said in verse 11, that the earth brings forth the tender herb and the fruit-tree bears fruit. This refers to different stages of understanding, different stages of knowledge, and finally a man is created in the image of God. From the standpoint of esotericism a man is not simply his physical body, his strength, his violence, his primitive instincts: *a man is his understanding*, from the esoteric point of view, and there are very few men from this point of view. All esotericism

is about overcoming violence, about increasing consciousness, first of oneself and then of others. Superman is not a gigantic replica of an ordinary man: superman is an utterly different kind of man. An ordinary mechanical man—i.e. a man more or less as we all are still—is given the first shock, but the beginning of a new kind of man starts from the point where—to quote Genesis—“the spirit of God moves on the face of the waters.” As you know, water refers to truth, in the language of parables. When a man has magnetic centre in him, although his earth may be “waste and void” and in thick darkness, he will feel that there must be something other than the external world of the senses in which he finds himself. And so something may move in his mind, which is the seat of his understanding of truth, and his next state may be that he begins to see light. ... Let us terminate this commentary by saying that esoteric knowledge is light. It is light to those who have been moved already.

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 407-408. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

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

41st Guideline



Jesus did not teach a specific method of meditation or bodily discipline for quieting the imagination, memory, and emotions.

We should choose a spiritual practice adapted to our particular temperament and natural disposition.

We must also be willing to dispense with it when called by the Spirit to surrender to his direct guidance.

The Spirit is above every method or practice. To follow his inspiration is the sure path to perfect freedom.

Seeds

To Rest in the Beauty of God

And so the true contemplative life does not consist in the enjoyment of interior and spiritual pleasures. Contemplation is something more than a refined and holy aestheticism of the intellect and of the will, in love and faith. To rest in the beauty of God as a pure concept, without the accidents of image or sensible species or any other representation, is a pleasure which still belongs to the human order. It is perhaps the highest pleasure to which nature has access and many people do not arrive at it by their natural powers alone—they need grace before they can experience this satisfaction which is of itself within the reach of nature. And nevertheless, since it is natural and can be desired by nature and acquired by natural disciplines, it must not be confused with supernatural contemplation.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, page 210.

JUNE CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

June 14

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a potluck dish to share.

MONTHLY

1st Sunday

Bring non-perishable items for Caritas

June 7, Community Workday 9-noon

June 17

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

Tuesdays

Centering Prayer Support Group 7:30-9 pm

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



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*Afterwards Jesus Himself,
through them,
sent forth from east to west
the sacred and imperishable proclamation
of eternal salvation.
Amen.*

Mark 16:20



Gloria in Excelsus Deo!

Pentecost

The peace of the Lord is the supreme gift
that is offered to us on this feast.

Peace is something greater than joy or any emotion.

It is beyond joy and beyond suffering.

It is the rerooting of our entire being and self-identity in its Source
so that the feeling of being separated from God is dissolved.

There is no more feeling of separation from God
once the grace of Pentecost has done its work.

Peace is defined as the tranquility of order: everything in its right place.

The right order for human beings is to
see, hear, touch, feel, and taste God in everything that happens ...

The grace of Pentecost enables us to hear God
speaking in every human being and in every event.

'Here He comes! I embrace Him – hidden in this trial,
in this dreadful person, in this stomach ache, in this overwhelming joy.'

He is in the present moment
no matter what the content of the moment is.

Thomas Keating, *Reawakenings*