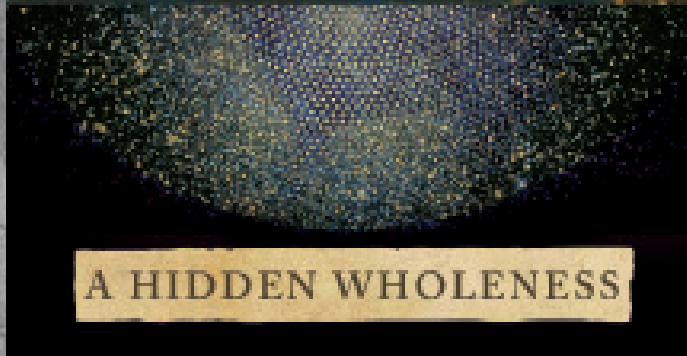


December 2017
Volume 29
Number 12



THE MARK

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



A HIDDEN WHOLENESS

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

BY TIM COOK

The manger scene at the back of our church reveals and remembers the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem as it is described for us in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The differing narratives in each of these accounts have pretty much merged into the commonly celebrated version of the Christmas story. Mark does not mention it in his Gospel. In the Gospel according to John, the story is told on a profound and deeper cosmic level that I believe holds greater power for feeling and experiencing the inclusion of our own particular personal lives in that amazing story when we seek to understand it.

John opens his Gospel narrative with the Creation story that begins with Light:

The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word.

The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one.

Everything was created through him; nothing – not one thing! – came into being without him.

What came into existence was

Life, and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out. ...

The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light.

He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice.

He came to his own people, but they didn't want him

But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God-selves.

These are the God begotten, not blood begotten, not flesh begotten, not sex-begotten.

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1:1-5, 10-14 The Message

The technical achievements of our human species like the Hubble Space Telescope and the newer James Webb Space Telescope are marvels of human creativity. They give us views of creation that reveal some of the earliest moments of the Universe and the first emanation of light. But that very amazing inventiveness and intelligence that we humans employ to peer into manifest existence was there, in the beginning, enfolded in the infinite possibility of The Word. Nothing has ever happened, will happen or can happen that is not and was not founded and enfolded in that Living Light from which all forms emerge and to which they all return.

The Word is the Life-Light from which we come and of which we are expressions. The Word is the Logos, the Divine Intelligence, the Creative Principle that is in and through all that can be known and in and through all knowers and all knowing. The prologue to John's Gospel is a complete story

of the entire universe that is never finished. Each human life recapitulates the entire process as each of us humbly realizes our own staggering identity in The Word. We join those who have gone before us into the Mystical Body of Christ, the community of souls in whom The Word became flesh and blood and moved into our personal, interior neighborhood.

The Word is Light. All that is...is Light. Light is all there is. Our bodies are light, our hearts are light, our minds are light. Every aspect of every moment comes blazing into the worlds in perfect Mystery. We'll never explain it. We can only live it.

Take some slow and deliberate time to deeply read and ponder John's prologue. Reading it over several times as we do in Lectio Divina creates an opportunity for discovering our own lives in those eternal, cosmic verses. It may help us to understand all the others in our lives as creations of the Light of Divine Intelligence too. There is endless food for

understanding embedded there.

The Cosmic Creative Mystery, which can and does do all things, took human birth in Bethlehem so that all humans of all time can learn that we too, as Jesus said, "*are the light of the world*" *Matthew 5:14*.

This is the last newsletter article that I will write as pastor of The Church of Conscious Harmony. Our 30 years together as a contemplative community, in our monastery without walls, have blessed Barbara and me more than words could ever express. In truth, though, words aren't really needed. The Word is here as conscious light reflecting back at us through the shining faces and open-hearted friendships that have been born here. The Life-Light is consciously pouring into the world as The Word is expressing itself in our church. No darkness, no unconsciousness, will ever put it out.

Our hearts overflow with gratitude for the gift of Christ, the Light of God, the Living Word born in our community. ☸



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UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

BY BARBARA COOK

If we look beneath all the paper, tinsel, gifts and parties, we might feel and sense the original cause for the Christmas season. Conscious Light was coming into the darkness. As members of a contemplative community, I'm sure many of us have prepared to welcome that Light into or deeper into our lives and our hearts by participating in Advent, attending the one-day retreat at the Church or the 7-day Advent retreat. However we choose to participate, Advent offers us an opportunity to deepen our Centering Prayer in order to make more space for Christ so that on the day when so many of us celebrate gift giving, special dinners and family, we also feel a deep stirring and a subtle knowing that touches us warmly and with the joy and wonder of the Incarnation.

This is the last Christmas Tim and I will be celebrating with our community in this octave of our church family. I feel deep gratitude for traveling deeper into Christ with you and for the gift of Centering Prayer and the Work of Inner Christianity. They have brought me to a deep knowledge of God and revealed interior obstacles to His unconditional love and some ways to non-identify with them and let them go.

Our journey together has been gifted by guides and travelling

companions, Bernadette Roberts, Fr. Thomas Keating, Br. Wayne Teasdale, Fr. William Menninger, Fr. Carl Arico and Sr. Illia Delio and of course, each one of you. Companionship in Christ is a gift without measure. This journey in community began when we prayed to find others, like ourselves, who wished to make Christ the center of their lives. That prayer has been obviously answered in your presence with us. As we all move deeper into our journey, we know that more light and more universal Christ-consciousness awaits each of us. As friends in Christ, we will always be together – One in Love.

Fr. Thomas has said that we are here to manifest God. That rebirthing process proceeds us, bit-by-bit, we die to our separate self-sense through our twice-daily practice of Centering Prayer. As self decreases its influence, we become increasingly open as vessels for God's love.

Bernadette has described the spiritual journey as becoming increasingly comfortable with not knowing. Only the self thinks that it can figure it all out. Here, at the Church of Conscious Harmony, we are full of the grace that comes from throwing ourselves into God. Now, as we are about to go into different places in our journey into Christ, we can't know in advance what it will all look like

but we can, as always, trust our heart's desire to manifest God on His terms. God is the One that has placed that very desire in our hearts. So as we move forward in the Divine Mystery, we trust you will also. We know that we live in a desire-driven universe. May the desire of your hearts be for Christ, to be Christ-bearers in this world and in the entire cosmos. As Jesus said, we'll get that and everything else that we need will be added as well. Unimaginable good awaits us all.

Sr. Illia reminded us that to grow is to change. We don't have to look for change but to simply and trustingly be open to change as it offers itself to us. That is the evolution that is happening now and that we are participating in as contemplatives. It is the growing tip of Christ in man, manifesting God in humanity. Like Jesus, we are born as Christ, in these ordinary and humble circumstances these human bodies. We are learning to take up God's offer to live as ordinary, free people; living out of God's extraordinary love. Our church is seed bed for growing wholeness in our lives, the world and the cosmos. Now that's some Christmas present and I am so happy to share it with you.

Peace to you. ☸

A YEAR IN REVIEW: COMMUNION

In 2017, we were invited to join in community to move ever deeper together in the annual aim of “Communion.”

Our intention has been to know the communion of God, Man and the cosmos, to clearly see God within and in all.

*In Him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible;*

... all things were created through Him and for Him.

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

*... For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through Him to reconcile all things.*

Colossians 1:16-17, 19

January	Influencing All
February	Communion
March	Allowing, Accepting, Loving What Is
April	Resurrection
May	Encountering a World Full of God
June	Inter-Being
July	Reverdure
August	Holiness of Being
September	Compassion
October	Contemplative Love
November	Thankfulness for the Gift of Life
December	A Hidden Wholeness

I find joy in Your testimonies ... Glory to God forever! Psalm 119:14

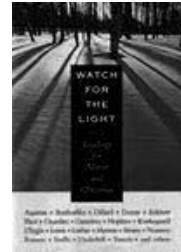
Previous issues of *The Mark* are available at consciousharmony.org/read-listen/the-mark if you would like to review and reflect on these monthly community aims. Each issue is dedicated to the monthly topic.

May you continue to go ever deeper in your journey to perceive the mystery of Christ everywhere and in everything.



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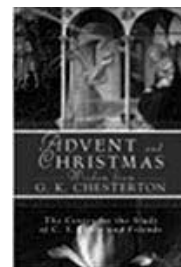
Suggested Titles for December



Watch for the Light
Readings for Advent and Christmas
by Plough Publishing House



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



Advent and Christmas
Wisdom from G. K. Chesterton
by The Center for the Study of
C.S. Lewis and Friends

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



I find joy in Your testimonies ... Glory to God forever! Psalm 119:14

ANNUAL AIM: COMMUNION

A HIDDEN WHOLENESS

FAITH BY NORMA LAIRD

There is in all visible things
an invisible fecundity,
a dimmed light,
a meek namelessness,
a hidden wholeness.
This mysterious Unity
and integrity is Wisdom, the
Mother of all, *Natura naturans*.
There is in all things
an inexhaustible sweetness
and purity, a silence
that is a fount of action and joy.
It rises up in wordless gentleness
and flows out to me from the
unseen roots of all created being,
welcoming me tenderly,
saluting me
with indescribable humility.
This is at once my own being,
my own nature,
and the Gift of my Creator's
Thought and Art within me,
speaking ... as my sister, Wisdom.
Thomas Merton, *Hagia Sophia*

You who sleep in my breast
are not met with words
but in the emergence of life within life
and of wisdom within wisdom.
You are found in communion.

Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*

I used to think that faith was a hyped-up version of hope, as if one could have hope and add more vigor and wishful thinking to the mix and voila, faith would manifest. That made sense to me because people would often say, "have faith" when I found myself in the most utterly bleak circumstances in which one hopes for the best and hangs on for dear life. My inability

to grasp the true beauty of faith was compounded by the way I had heard the term used in churches of mainstream religion. Faith seemed like a fairy tale with no real grit or substance. Just believe and it will happen! The concept remained a mystery, obscure and vague. I didn't have any real spiritual understanding of faith because I had not truly experienced it.

Through the years, I have come to believe faith is a beautiful gift from God, occurring when one is open and receptive to the universe. Interestingly, I have found this gift is not randomly given, nor is it a reward for good behavior, selflessness, holiness, or suffering. It is a gift revealed in my innermost being by a loving God wishing and willing me into wholeness.

My first experience of faith occurred in my early twenties when I had made a sufficient mess of my life. I was hanging on by a thread in a life that could be best described as something just short of insanity, when one of my sisters brought me to the Unity church in south Austin. Coincidentally (or **not** as I have come to believe), Tim and Barbara were the ministers there. In all honesty I cannot remember a thing about the service except that it struck something deep down in my core. Often, Tim has said they used to be ministers of Christian sunshine, but they were much more. They were powerful. When I left that day with my two small children, back to a lifestyle that seemed hopeless, I was suddenly

elevated in understanding about my situation. After that service, my thinking was broader. It was as if a lens from deep within shifted my focus from the problem to the solution. I felt drawn to this beautiful note sounding in my heart, shading my perspective – a sort of spiritual wisdom was unfolding. It was clear that my life was incongruent with this beautiful, mystery revealing itself inside me. A deep knowing emerged making it clear that if I were to keep my heart and mind open to this truth of my being and pursue what occurred to me as the next right thing, then all of the chaos around me would one day disappear. I used to say that I had a spiritual experience on that day, which is absolutely the case; but now I know that experience to be one of faith – a knowing, despite all appearances, that the Truth of God's love was pulling me forward into harmony with my true self. This esoteric wisdom, a knowing not rooted in the reality of my senses, was the seed of faith sewn into my being, informing me and guiding me. What was striking to me about this incident was that it

was a sheer gift from God. Nothing I had done, or could do, could have given me the deep knowing that all would be well. I found myself opening to the Grace of God and then acting accordingly.

Faith is being sure of what we hoped for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1

In other words, faith is certitude that the truth will manifest despite appearances, making it one of the most difficult Christian concepts for me to understand because it is not aligned with the appearance of things. The feeling or sense of faith is difficult to describe. It can appear as wishful thinking and is marked by a certitude that sometimes defies logic. The true nature of faith is elusive; a sometimes fleeting gift that serves as a beacon towards our true nature, a nature that is in harmony with others, the earth and the cosmos.

Throughout the course of my life, I have experienced faith guiding me through desperate and trying times; and more often than not, something in my life had to be destroyed before a new life could begin. At times it was painful

and not the way I had planned. Obviously, after that mystical experience in my early twenties, my life did not magically erupt into bliss, nor was my spiritual path clear or in a straight line of ascent. Instead, my spirit has taken the long and arduous path in its evolution. Being in this world is an exciting, beautiful thing; but getting caught up in it is not. When I do find myself caught up in worldly affairs that shift my focus from the internal light to the struggles of life and society, periods of chaos tend to erupt. Yet, in that chaos, faith informs me time and again to get back on the path and continue my practice and my focus. By doing so, I am called into alignment with my true nature, others and God. I have found my quest for wholeness is a life long journey.

Faith's fertile ground is love. Many years ago, my daughter's life was besieged by a powerful and destructive addiction. It came on so swiftly and with such tremendous magnitude that within a short period of time, this loving, beautiful being had transformed into someone almost unrecognizable to me. My world crumbled as hers fell apart. It was devastating. I put my heart and soul into helping her find a way out,

using every resource available and calling on my friends and family. I prayed for her healing and had done everything within my power to pull her out of it; yet any progress that came about fell into relapse. We worked tirelessly to change her course, get her back on track, but to no avail. It began to seem hopeless as she drifted further into a very dark and dangerous place. One day, feeling heartbroken and defeated, I tried to wrap my mind around the fact that my daughter could remain in the throes of addiction. I prayed and what came to me was a vision that her true nature, not the addiction, would win the battle. It was certitude, clear and concise, that addiction and destruction was not her path. This certitude was in direct contrast to the hopelessness I felt. This spiritual wisdom was a sheer gift from God. I knew, with a deep understanding that defied circumstances, that if I steered the course with unwavering love, her good would shine through.

My mind developed a narrow, solid focus informed by the knowledge of my heart. I could allow no thoughts of her to enter my mind except to see her as a beautiful child of God, no matter what the appearance of the situation. There

were many tears and heartaches through the struggle, but the knowledge of my heart, or what I came to know as the invisible truth or faith, allowed me to be tough as nails and yet tenderly manifest unfailing love. Later she wrote, "Mom thank you for loving me with a love that could move mountains." Faith gave love more strength and courage, allowing me to be for the truth of her. This is not to say that it was my effort that brought about her healing. It was a community of family and friends, a deep knowledge of her true self (buried under the addiction) and, of course, God's great healing power. Yet the gift of receiving faith in the bleakest hour fueled my love and became a driving force.


Maurice Nicoll wrote in his Commentaries on page 1718, "all your experiences *of truth seen and understood* for yourself...is the most precious thing that you have created and possess. This is why the Work teaches that understanding is the strongest force we can create. And if you begin to feel the power it conducts, which can lift you above the ills of life, great and small, you are catching a glimpse, I think, of the meaning of the word translated as Faith, which is truth seen as

being true, and not what you are told is true.” Nicoll states so clearly the connection of understanding as the opening for faith. My experience is that understanding occurs when our knowledge strikes a chord so deep within that we can’t help but to manifest that truth in our being, through our actions and communication in this world.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God...For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Through the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, I have become interiorly receptive and reflective, allowing God an opportunity to shine a ray of light into the darkness and transform my being. That beautiful ray draws me toward wholeness with others, the earth, and the universe. I call that ray of light... faith.

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Matthew 17:20 

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

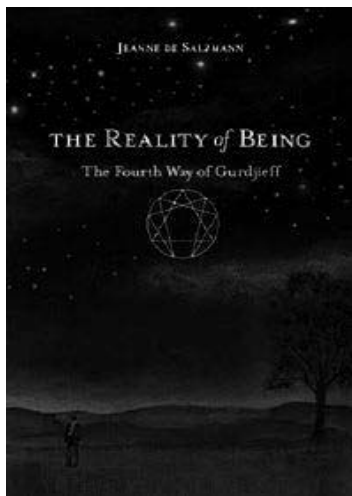
In *Sophia*, the highest wisdom-principle, all the greatness and majesty of the unknown that is in God and all that is rich and maternal in His creation are united inseparably, as paternal and maternal principles, the uncreated Father and created Mother-Wisdom.

Faith is what opens to us this higher realm of unity, of strength, of light, of sophianic love ...where the Truth is One and Undivided and takes all to itself in the wholeness of *Sapientia*, or *Sophia*. ...

Our full spiritual life is life in wisdom, life in Christ.

The darkness of faith bears fruit in the light of wisdom.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, page 141.



THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

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

A WHOLLY DIFFERENT VIBRATION

Forces from all worlds pass through me, from the lowest to the highest, the most pure. And I do not know it. I do not feel them. I do not serve them. For this to be possible, the barriers that separate me from my essential being must fall, and I have to become conscious of myself as a whole.

... When our attention is placed on ourselves, we become aware of tensions within our whole body, which we feel as a hardening of matter. Yet they could be felt as vibrations of different kinds, each having its own speed, its own density, its own sound. ... Nevertheless, from behind the chaos, I may feel the action of a vibration that is wholly different in its intensity. ... I feel an influence more luminous, more intelligent than my usual awareness. And I feel a wish to obey this influence, to serve it. In order to attune myself, I become more sensitive. Now my tensions seem useless, even bothersome, and fall away by themselves. I become permeable, as though each and all the parts of me were attuned to the wavelength of this subtle vibration.

The essential effort is always consciousness of “I.” Everything is related to this—touching my essence. What contains the energy is temporary. The energy is permanent. I recognize this in stillness when, with a pure attention, a kind of sixth sense, I disengage myself from associations and reactions that distort my vision of the real. I need a conscious attitude, an impulse coming from all three centers, in

order to touch my essence, the current of life in me. At this point, I see my reaction in receiving an impression and I am not wholly lost in it. This experience is what could be stable, forming a new center of gravity in me. It is here that I need to hold myself. ⚠

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being – The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*, pages 254-256. 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.

CHRISTMAS SEASON SERVICES

Christmas Eve Day Service

Dec 24 10-11 am
(no Lectio Divina or brunch)

Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

Dec 24 6-7 pm

New Year's Eve Day Service

Dec 31 10-11 am
(no Lectio Divina or brunch)

New Year's Eve Service

December 31 8:30 pm-12:15 am

Taize Service 8:30-9:30 pm

Centering Prayer & Fellowship *

9:30-11:00 pm

*Bring light finger foods to share

Burning Bowl Ceremony

11-11:45 pm

Centering Prayer

11:45 pm-12:15 am

Office closed and no weekday services or classes Dec 25-30

2018 CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT SCHEDULE

CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS AT THE CHURCH OF CONSCIOUS HARMONY

Jan 13	8:30 am-4:30 pm (p)
Feb 17	8:30 am-4:30 pm (p)
Feb 18-19*	Sun 8 am-5:30 pm & Mon 7 am-4:30 pm
Mar 17	United in Prayer Day†
Mar 31	8:30 am-12:30 pm
Apr 21	8:30 am-4:30 pm (b)
May 11-12	Fri 8:30 am-5:30 pm & Sat 7 am-4:30 pm
May 19	8:30 am-4:30 pm (b)
June 9	8:30 am-4:30 pm (p)
July 14	8:30 am-12:30 pm
Aug 18-19	Sat 8:30 am-5:30 pm & Sun 8 am-5:30 pm
Sept 22	8:30 am-4:30 pm (p)
Oct 20	8:30 am-4:30 pm (b)
Nov 10	12:30 pm-5 pm
Dec 15	8:30 am-12:30 pm

Costs: Half-day ~ \$10 love offering One-day ~ \$15 love offering

Two-day commuter retreat \$100 (sleep at home; meals included)

* Can be combined with the Saturday 1-day retreat,
for a 3-day retreat experience.

(p) potluck lunch or (b) brown bag lunch

†Held at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS AT CEDARBRAKE RETREAT AND RENEWAL CENTER

Jan 19-23	5-day Renewal	Cost: \$475
Feb 23-Mar 4	10-day Lenten	Cost: \$875
June 15-24	10-day	Cost: \$775**
July 27-Aug 1	6-day	Cost: \$545
Sep 14-19	6-day Welcoming Prayer	Cost: \$545
Nov 30-Dec 6	7-day Advent	Cost: \$675

Double room prices. Single rooms, if available, are an additional \$10/night.

**Double rooms only for Jun 15-24 retreat.

Contact the office for further information and registration.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Dec 9 8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a potluck dish to share

The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program
Dec 14 7 pm

Holiday – Office Closed
Dec 25-29

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music
Dec 19 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

Wednesdays
Prayer Circle 10:15-11 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm
Yoga 7:30 pm-8:30 pm \$10

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

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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*The true light, which enlightens everyone,
 was coming into the world.
 And to those who would accept Him
 He gave power to become children of God,
 to those who believe in Him,
 who are born not by natural generation
 nor by human choice
 nor by a man's decision but of God.*

John 1:9, 12

THE GRACE OF THE INCARNATION

In the parable of the Birth of Christ,
 there was no room in the inn – which means
 that esoteric teaching, given as it has been
 through the ages, has always found ‘no room in the inn’
 – the inn being something in a man very close
 to the highroad, yet a little apart,
 that might receive strangers.

The ideas of the Work are exactly strangers
 – strange to one's ordinary thoughts and ideas.
 Now it is only through Work self-observation,
 over a long time, that room can be made
 in a man, a woman, for the knowledge of the Work
 to enter and begin its gradual, successive,
 not noticed transformations of Being.

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

Who I really am is becoming more and more
 the movement of the Spirit within me
 – not the *I am* of myself,
 but the great *I Am* of God.

Thomas Keating, *Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ*

