February 27, 2020 – This Work: A Beautiful Thing
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*“Now the Work can only be done in the spirit of its own beauty and light, in the spirit of its true message and significance. Life on earth is nothing but a field for working on oneself, so that one can return whence one came”*

*Commentaries,* p. 1742

The first writing we see in the Commentaries is not a commentary per se, but the first of two letters Maurice Nicoll wrote to his student “Bush”. It’s a wonderful exposition on what he calls “the extraordinary situation of man in regard to his development”. He describes how the Work is about transformation of the present moment, or rather, of how we take the present moment. It’s aim is to show us how we’re asleep, and how we can awaken to a higher consciousness. That higher consciousness or level of being is immediately above us and can be accessed at any moment, if we know how. Accessing the vertical has nothing to do with time, the vertical is this moment…and this one…and this one…The vertical is in the eternal now, so to speak, and through Centering Prayer and the Work of Inner Christianity, we are given the tools to open ourselves to that eternal now.

One of the most beautiful images that is given in Dr. Nicoll’s second letter to Bush, is that the Essence of each of us comes down from the stars. It teaches that we are born as Essence, and that it’s the part of us that can truly grow and develop. Does Essence come in as a totally “blank slate”? It’s an interesting idea to consider; anyone who has been with babies knows that newborns are all very different, so it seems as if there is something present, either through genetics and/or perhaps past lives. The fact that these differences are present from the beginning gives credence to another Work idea: that we have something specific to learn in this life, and again, that we’re placed in the absolutely perfect conditions to serve our development and transformation.

So we’re born as a beautiful, innocent Essence, but by what means does it grow and develop? The Work teaches that it can only grow to a small extent on its own, and in order for it to develop further, it must be surrounded by personality. Personality is formed by our upbringing, life experiences, education and interests. And the Work says that the richer and more varied those are, the better, because personality becomes the food for Essence. Through applying the Work ideas to ourselves, and seeing our various attitudes, pictures, motivations, patterns, etc., we gain understanding. And through that understanding, those parts of the personality that don’t serve us are digested and become food for Essence. This is related to one of the big aims of the Work, which is the purification of the emotional center, the clearing away or digestion of the negative emotional programs that have kept us from knowing the truth and beauty of our essence. When we see through one of these programs, *really* see the impact it has had on our lives, the result can be profound.

A story to illustrate this…several years ago when I had begun seriously working with Byron Katie’s method of self-inquiry (which to me is a deep, meditative practice of three-centered observation, non-identification and self-remembering done not in the moment, but retrospectively), one morning I decided to work on a belief that I had held for most of my life. As I sat wondering about what that was, the belief that eventually arose was “my mother never let me express my anger.” My mother and I never had a close relationship. As a child I had a temper and cried a lot, which my mom had a hard time dealing with. She had received the message from her upbringing that negative emotions were not ok, not to be expressed and even dangerous. No wonder she couldn’t deal with mine - or her frustration with them!

Returning to the inquiry…while I was sitting in the third question, (“What happens? How do you react when you believe that thought?”) in addition to noticing body sensations, feelings and other thoughts, what arose was a memory of when I was 4 or 5. I was sitting on the floor, angry about not getting my way, and said something like “damnit!” My mom came over, grabbed me by the arm, took me into the bathroom and proceeded to wash my mouth out with soap. Certainly not a parenting technique we would use today! But as I sat in inquiry and meditated on that moment, all of a sudden, the veil parted, and I saw the utter reality of the situation. *There* was *a hand that put soap in a mouth*. That’s it. Nothing more. All story and interpretation were *gone*. I proceeded to break down into cathartic sobbing, then hysterical laughter. In that moment I saw how everything I had believed about that event AND my mom was ALL story, all interpretation! But the most important and beautiful thing was that I saw that we were both totally innocent - innocent in our reactions, innocent in our beliefs and attitudes about each other - there was no guilt anywhere. And seeing the truth of that was why it was funny. For a moment I entered an unclouded consciousness where I could see that all these stories and interpretations we have are all just silly and unimportant. I was surprised that there wasn’t any regret or remorse, but I saw that it couldn’t have happened any other way due to what each of us was thinking and believing at the time. I also saw that my belief that mom had never allowed me to express my anger was *not* true. The truth was that *I never allowed her to express her anger* in the sense that I never asked *her* what was wrong when I thought she was angry, never thought about how *my* behavior affected *her*, or showed any concern or compassion for her emotional difficulties, outside how they affected me. That sounds harsh, but it was a gentle seeing, non-critical, because it came from a deep understanding of the innocent outcomes of confused believing. The experience has changed the way I look at life, and I believe in that moment of seeing reality and the resulting understanding, my emotional center got some much-needed purification.

Returning to the topic of Essence and personality, we can see that it’s important in the first half of life to engage with the world in different ways, gain knowledge, and learn skills through a career, vocation or family. At some point, if we’re fortunate, Magnetic Center is awakened, and we begin to feel that there must be something else besides the life aims we’ve been engaged in. We are drawn to a book, a teaching or teacher, or in our case, to the Church of Conscious Harmony. And so we begin our journey in the Fourth Way. However, as Fr. Keating would say, just because we’ve turned towards God, the self or personality isn’t just going to roll over and die. The Work teaches that the personality is the active part of us, and that Essence is passive. In other words, we are still living out of our old programming, beliefs, and patterning, and Essence is well covered over by personality and most probably quite undeveloped. But that’s just the way of it and we come to learn that we are, and actually, always have been, in the perfect circumstances for our transformation. So we sound the DO in our personal Work octave. The Work uses terminology from the musical scale to describe what is called the Law of Seven, also known as the Law of Manifestation which will be talked about in depth at a later date. DO, the first step in the Work octave, is *valuation of the ideas*. We find meaning in them, they make sense to us and so we value them. The second step, or RE, is *application of the ideas to oneself*. Once we value the ideas, we try them on, apply them and verify them for ourselves. The third step is MI, or the *recognition of personal difficulties*. We begin to Work, we make aims, and we seem to fail miserably at keeping them. We see that it’s not so simple as it seemed! Those are the first three steps in the Work octave. But I do want to emphasize the DO or valuation. What we value and love we spend time on, we nurture, so it’s important at the beginning to sound a strong DO, as we did the first night of the Journey School. I’m sure that those of you who were here in the Sanctuary or watching on Zoom felt it. It was expressed as a deep wish for the School, and the Work teaches that a wish is the strongest DO we can sound. A wish is actually called a passive DO, as opposed to an active DO, such as a New Year’s resolution, where I decide that for example *I will* go to the gym five times per week; *I will* eat only healthy foods for the entire year; *I will* stop my caffeine and alcohol use, etc. In the active DO, *we’re* going to make it happen, yet what do we get? An equal amount of resistance or Second Force, interior or exterior, that usually short-circuits our resolution rather quickly. With a deep, heart-felt wish, or passive DO, we also aim towards something we want, but we are also opening to help from the Third Force of the Work, which assists us when we are met with Second Force from inside us or outer life. So through our valuation and wish, we come to see the radiant beauty of the Work, and understand that it truly is here to lead us back to the stars.