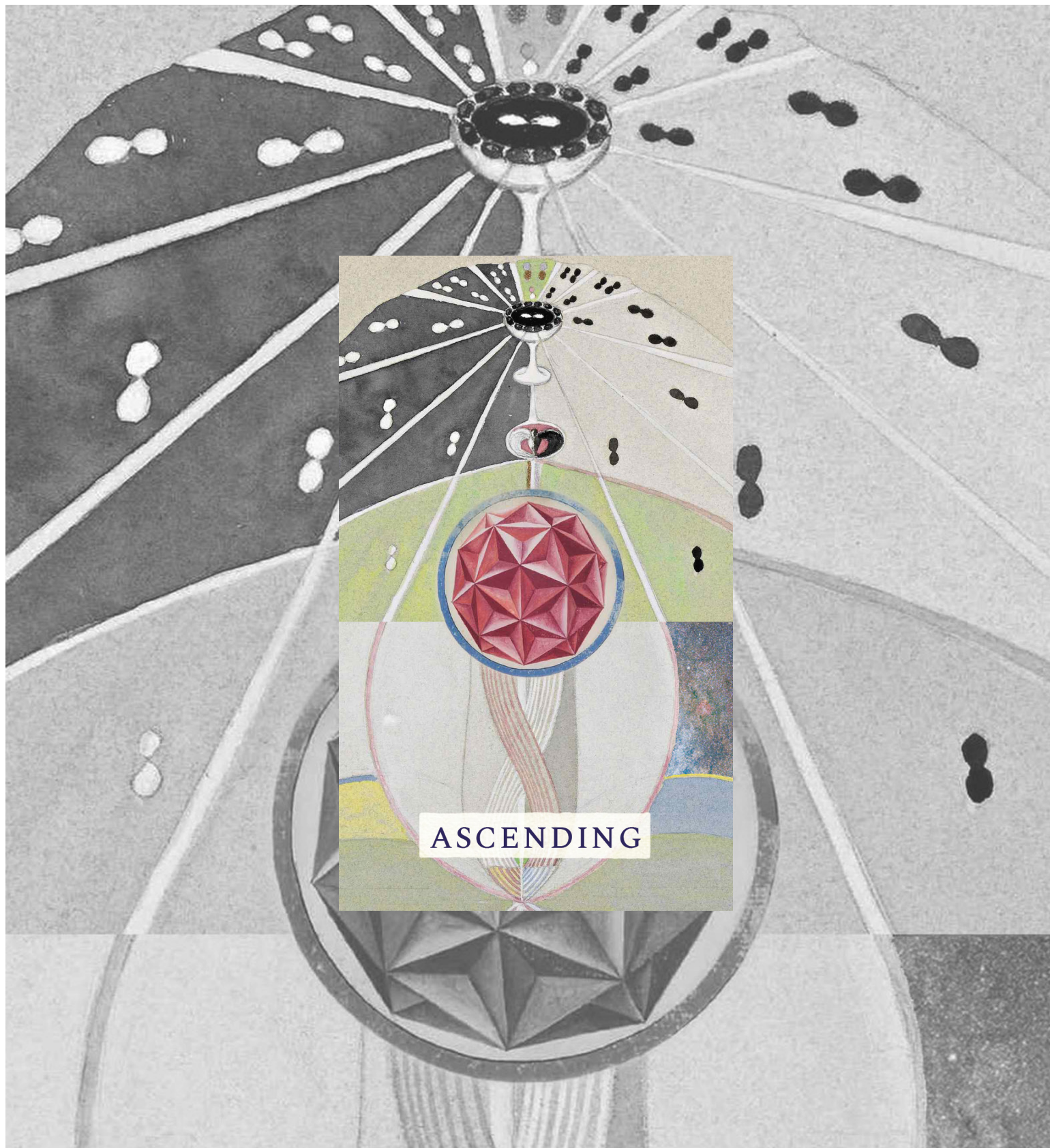


May 2021  
Volume 33  
Number 5



# THE MARK

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



ASCENDING

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# ASCENDING INTO STILLNESS

BY PETER HAAS

In the winter of 1924, the transcendent poet Rainer Maria Rilke inscribed these lines on the copy of his masterpiece, *The Duino Elegies*, before giving it to his Polish translator to begin the work of conveying Rilke's quite original and mystical German stanzas into a different language:

“Happy are those who know:  
Behind all words, the  
Unsayable stands; And  
from that Source alone,  
the Infinite Crosses over to  
gladness, and us – Free of  
our bridges, Built with the  
stone of distinctions, So that  
always, within each delight,  
We gaze at what is purely  
single and joined.”

This inscription must have released Rilke's translator from the fear of not getting every word right. The invitation and reminder that “behind all words, the Unsayable stands” may be said another way: Beyond the Logos is the Absolute.

Beyond words...silence.

This insight accords with the second-century wisdom of St. Irenaeus, who wrote in his *Against Heresies* that “silence is God's first language.” Everything else is merely translation. Perhaps then the translation of silence into a different language is stillness. Silence births stillness and stillness births silence. They are paired in their purposes, so closely connected in their mother tongue that there is, in the end, no distinction. Through our daily meditative prayer practice, we can understand both languages: the language of silence and the language of stillness, as they help us understand our self and others more completely, more compassionately.

The English word *silence* emerges from several language streams. The Gothic verb *anasilan* described the sound of wind dying down, and the Latin *desinere* meant to stop. Such linguistic sources

suggest that the word silence is related to ceasing and stillness, as in the quiet that arises after being active. Thus, while silence is not the opposite of sound, silence is the opposite of noise.

It turns out St. Irenaeus was cosmologically correct. In a study done in 2005, Mark Whittle, an astronomy professor at the University of Virginia, analyzed the sound of the big bang explosion and concluded that the creative explosion that occurred nearly fourteen billion years ago wasn't really a loud explosion at all. It was a completely silent event, because the initial expansion was pure energy moving outward in a perfectly balanced sphere, like an unhindered ripple from a single rock thrown into a still pond. In Whittle's view, “there were no compression waves, no sound, just quiet, brilliant, live expansion.” But the silence didn't last long. Whittle concludes that the big bang was “a moment of silence followed by a

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rapidly descending scream which builds to a deep roar and ends in a deafening hiss.” Similarly, contemplative theologian Raimon Panikkar intuited in meditative prayer that “silence is a kind of property of Being prior to Being.” So, it is not far-fetched to say that the universe emerged from silence.

This modern insight is grounded in an important passage from the fourth-century monk, John Cassian, who with beautiful clarity establishes a theological foundation strong enough to carry the load of many future centuries of contemplative experience. He writes in *Conference 9*:

“Yet sometimes the mind which advances to that true disposition of purity and has already begun to be rooted in it, conceiving all of these at one and the same time and rushing through them all like a kind of ungraspable and devouring flame, pours out to God wordless prayers

of the purest vigor. These the Spirit itself makes to God as [the Spirit] intervenes with unutterable groans, unbeknownst to us, conceiving at that moment and pouring forth in wordless prayer such great things that they not only – would say – cannot pass through the mouth but are unable even to be remembered by the mind later.”

Similarly, when discussing the meaning of Jesus’ teaching on the Lord’s Prayer, and the invitation to *go into the secret room, close the door and pray to the Father who is in secret* (Matthew 6:6), Cassian emphasizes:

“We pray with the door shut when, with closed lips and in total silence, we pray to the searcher not of voices but of hearts. We pray in secret when, intent in heart

and mind alone, we offer our petitions to God alone.”

In both Irenaeus and Cassian, we can see the early outlines of the then still developing contemplative, interior tradition for unifying prayer, worship and spiritual leadership. Over time in the broader Eastern monastic tradition, the practice of stillness, or *hesychasm*, refers to interior quiet and stillness that attends to the prayer of the heart. Like Centering Prayer, *hesychia* is not passivity, but more like an intentional waiting upon God. Stillness is a disposition of both listening and consenting to God’s word and presence; God’s unsaying and absence.

We can cultivate our interior stillness toward our thoughts, appetites and passions through a hesychastic lifestyle, that is to say: through the spiritual practices. The purpose of the practice of stillness is to make us more receptive to God’s love and grace, so to be

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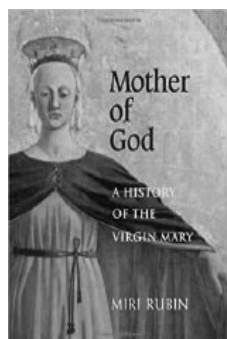
## BOOK LOOK

### MOTHER MARY

transformed more and more into the divine likeness. The writings of the *Philokalia* wisely teach us all that:

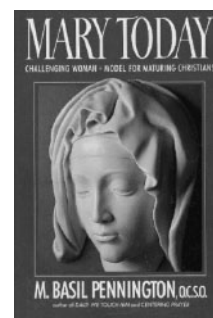
“Stillness [hesychia] gives birth to ascesis [practice], ascesis gives birth to tears, tears to fear, fear to humility, humility to the gift of wisdom, and wisdom to charity. Charity makes the soul healthy and free of passion, and then [one] may realize that [they are] not far from God.”

Stillness is hard to cultivate in our modern, busy life, and more challenging to practice in family life. Nevertheless, modeling stillness and presence in our own life can influence our community and our cosmos in subtle yet profound ways. Perhaps one way to think about these things is to feel the descent into silence as an ascent into stillness. As we go deeper into the silence, the stillness arises in us, and we are caught up in its qualities, and having been so touched by this ascension into stillness are never quite the same when we return to the realm of daily life with its attending crowds, noise and responsibilities. Then, as Rilke wished, we are free from all bridges that divide – filled with a delight that knows and feels the oneness joining heaven and earth, silence and sound, stillness and motion. ☉



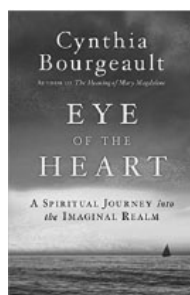
As we prepare for our May sermon series on Mary, two resources might be useful companions for our journey. The first is Miri Rubin’s exceptional overview of the history of Mary and devotion to Mary. In *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, Rubin provides an inspiring and balanced resource you can return to for more understanding on the role Mary has played in Christian faith and life.

The second resource is Basil Pennington’s deeply meaningful and personal affirmation of the joy and care Mary has provided to contemplatives throughout church history. In *Mary Today*, this beloved co-founder of Centering Prayer brilliantly and winsomely articulates how Mary is indeed, in the words of Bernadette Roberts, “the care of God.”



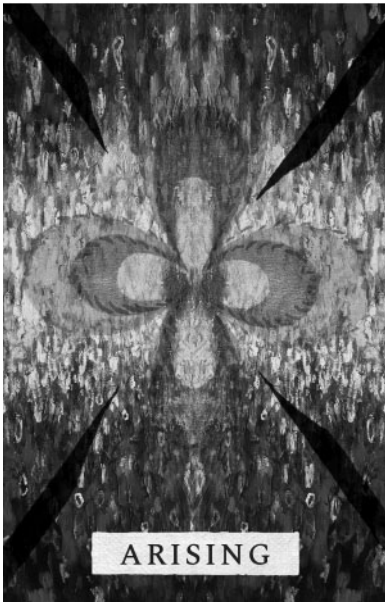
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## 2021 ANNUAL AIM READING



In *Eye of the Heart*, Cynthia Bourgeault references works from many of our wisdom teachers while pulling in other mystical traditions. She shares the evolution of her spiritual journey while helping us understand transformational energy through the eyes of our hearts and pointing the way to the body’s role in our spiritual journeys, here and beyond.

This book pairs so well with our 2021 Annual Aim theme, *The Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts*, to guide us in an interior transformation of our centers (emotional, intellectual and physical).



*Consecrate us in the Truth. Your word is Truth. John 17:17*

## ANNUAL AIM: TRUTH OPENS THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

ASCENDING BY JEFF WARD

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Genuine human growth  
incorporates all that is good on  
the more primitive levels  
of consciousness  
as one ascends to higher levels.  
Only the limitations  
of the earlier levels  
are left behind ...  
The Gospel calls us forth  
to full responsibility  
for our emotional life. ...  
to face the unconscious values  
that underlie  
the emotional programs  
for happiness  
and *to change them.*

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

*For everything  
that becomes visible is light.*

Ephesians 5:14

To wish, to will, is the most important  
and powerful thing in the world  
because it allows us to take an action  
that is not automatic. ...

If we wish, if we will, we can do it.

Without will, we cannot.

With conscious will, everything can be obtained.

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being, The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*

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Each day I wish, I will, I aim  
for consciousness.

If you have ever ridden a bike  
you have experienced the extra  
effort or energy needed to ascend  
to the top of the hill. I can feel  
my approach to the hill, I can feel  
the power in my legs needed to  
get me to the top of the hill, and I  
can feel my lungs thirsting for air  
as I push hard to the top. Once I

have made it to the top of the hill,  
I am still riding the bike; I am still  
in recovery mode from the extra  
energy used, but there is a sense  
of intention and accomplishment.  
Then I get the experience of riding  
downhill, which is much easier as  
less energy is needed to propel the  
bike forward, but more focus and  
consciousness is needed to control  
the speed of the experience.

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Each morning, I get up, sit in silence, say the Lord's Prayer, and intentionally practice Gratitude. This morning practice holds the simple magic to help my daily journey have a downhill focus. I find that the intentionality of a daily practice ascends me to the top of the hill and that the majority of the day proceeds as if I am going downhill with the wind blowing at my back. I observe myself as a little more intentional or a little more conscious than the day before. When I have rooted myself in intentional practice, I find that the volume of noise in my life is a little lower. Maybe this is because I have moved from my intellectual center to my emotional center and I have ascended from a primitive state to a higher state for the moment. My reaction time to emotional triggers is a little slower or the mundane has less impact on me. These days still provide the challenges of the human self – I still get frustrated with bureaucracy, I still get annoyed with my children squabbling, even irritable with my beloved. Yet the

grace that I experience is one of silence and space. I can appreciate the opportunity for growth as "Thank you. You owe me nothing. I owe you everything." Recently in one of my Spiritual Journey Group sessions, a fellow journeyer shared with the group that Gratitude is the Attitude of the Heart. His authentic share brought tears to my eyes. The simplicity of this wisdom is both powerfully ascending and beautiful. Thank you, my brother Loren.

In contrast, there are those uphill days where the sun or the rain is directly in my face as I pump and pump up the hill. These days come even sometimes after my Centering Prayer. Throughout my life, this human self wants me to sleep in, not be intentional about my practice, and forget the gratitude for my life, family, or friends. These days are difficult at best and I am not at a higher level. This level causes me to be short, aggressive, quick to react, and unconscious or asleep. I miss the beauty of the world. I miss the opportunity to

share random acts of kindness. I get stuck in the myth that **I am what I have and what I do**. When I am like this, I find a deep seeded anger that is always present, ready to respond, to judge, to lust, etc. I am in a world where all of my brothers and sister are asleep. I am asleep in the filters of life that have developed in me since I was a young boy. These filters drill my issues deeper into my tissues for replay at any moment in this mechanical, unconscious state. The ingrained patterns that I have tried to free myself of come alive and I fall back into the all too easy rhythm of old habits and old desires from my pleasure centers, forgetting that in reality they do not bring me comfort, security, happiness nor control. When I am asleep, it is very difficult to stop and smell the roses, to enjoy the beauties of the day, to be grateful for all that is. The Covid-19 pandemic has tested my practice, intentions, being, and spiritual growth. It's interesting that fear can stand in the way of my spirituality.

I used to tell myself that I got

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out of organized religion because of my good behavior. I grew up as an Episcopal follower. The church I attended with my family was a blessed place, as I didn't experience judgement, fortune, or inequality during my time at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Houston. I was first introduced into the act of service as I participated in many of the weekly Sunday Services. The biggest blessing that came to me out of St. Stephens was what I learned and believed in Hope. Hope gave me the light needed for my life.

In the mid-1980s, my family moved to a much smaller community and my religious experiences were very different. In the church my family attended, I witnessed judgement, status, and unconsciousness. This experience and my young male attitude pushed me away from organized religion altogether. I was blessed in that my spirituality was present in the outdoors – my appreciation for Mother Earth, the birds and bees, brothers and sisters and our shared journey. I found a little solace and

felt a connection here, although nothing to the extent of a daily practice.

Then many years later, my beloved invited me to attend The Church of Conscious Harmony (CCH) and the rest is history.


*Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Mathew 11:29*

There is no doubt in my heart the importance that CCH brings into my life. My beloved had attended CCH on and off for several years ahead of me. The first time I attended CCH, I could feel the spiritual energy by just setting foot on the campus, the worship service and message by Tim Cook stirred deep spiritual energies in my human body, and when Barbara Cook looked in my eyes while holding the Eucharist and said, "May you accept what you are to become," I could barely hold back tears. It was a day of reconnecting with spirituality, a true blessing. I

have found that every step I take or every opportunity I have to serve has overflowed my cup with abundance. So much reciprocity flows that my beloved and I were married at CCH by Peter Haas. We are a blended family that leverages love, spirituality, family, friends, and community to navigate the complexities of life. What is most interesting about my relationship with CCH is that it meets me where I am. If I am conscious enough to receive the spiritual food offered, my cup runneth over with abundance. When I have thirsted for deeper meaning or deeper intentions in my spiritual development, CCH has provided me a path to quench my thirst. I affirm when we pray,

"God's love has always met and will always meet all my needs, I give freely, and receive joyfully, and how blessed we are to simply remember God."

Thank you for all the blessings my brothers and sisters provide me.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. 

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# Elder Wisdom: Honoring Our Fathers and Mothers

Look Where You Want to Go BY TIM COOK

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In a time of ever-increasing demands for our attention and ever fragmenting distractions that come from culture or politics, what is stable for us? What can we count on as always being there?

When we adopt a daily practice, it's like getting to part with the busy, thought-filled self and the angst-ridden person who didn't do the last thing yet. It strengthens us and renews us to go back out not as victims, but rather as participants in a dance of the Spirit on earth. With that as a daily accompaniment, all the changes whether negative, positive, politics, religious structures or anything that changes, I'm deeper than that. My identity is deeper than that so the changing world goes by in a stream of impressions and conscious conceptions, but the Knower is still, even in the activity once that recognition comes.

It's nice to say, "Think about God always...." Well let's see it! I have to become aware. If I understand that God is the only presence and power in my life, then whatever my thoughts are, and whatever seems to suggest *other*

than God is a total waste of time and not true. I can be the Son of the Great One in the midst of ever-changing activities if I can notice when I close my heart and wish to open it again. Over and over, it's incumbent upon me to realize that I am impressing upon this world some things of my own impressions. If I see darkness, negativity and otherness, well, that's me. When I wake up to the fact that something is obstructing my view of this delicious friendship with God, I want to tear that down just as fast as I can! I want to learn to observe negative thinking, learn to observe negative emotions, and just let them go and come back to what never changes, which is the love of God, the ever-present God within us.

If I had one piece of advice it would be make a stable, daily practice that includes your body, your emotions, your intellect, your soul and your spirit all in one. I've been living this way since 1976, so it's an experience I want everyone to get to share with me!

For householders in the world going out into life working amidst all the impressions coming in, I am

called to connect as the mind of Christ: "My mind is one with the mind of God." When you look at that and ponder it, you realize that is all there is. The daily practice allows us to become responsible for the angry projections, the criticisms, and whatever else – you give that up for God. You want this or you want that? That will go away or change because everything that started will stop. However, the mind of God didn't ever start, the Presence of God didn't ever start, and it's never going to finish, so there's this strategic approach of where I put my attention. If I notice that I can't keep it there, then let's study what keeps obscuring it, let's study the inner work of Tim in a world of challenges and expressions. Oh, you didn't like the way that person dressed? Closed heart, open it again, bless you sir, I hope it's your happiest day ever. It's a constant learning to breathe the vertical breath. A vertical breath is breathing in the presence of God in my presence as a human. It's critical to do this, it's not optional, and it's not that you're a nice person or God will like



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you better. It's learning to breathe the breath that will lift your soul.

Big lessons come in lots of ways, but there's always principle involved that you might miss, or you didn't know. For me, the most convincing experience I've ever had of a principle was on my first motorcycle ride up in the mountains of Colorado. My friend Mike Sell wanted me to go up, but I didn't really want to because I didn't feel confident enough on my bike yet. His response was, "Ah, it'll be fine." As we came up to Loveland Pass, which is the place where the Eisenhower tunnel is now, but in those days there was a terrifying road that goes over the pass with lots of switchbacks and very steep angles. Going on switchbacks on a motorcycle, you've got to keep your balance and go fast enough, but not too fast. Frankly, I was scared. So, when we got to the top, the road is going up and there's this sudden, invisible

hard turn. My bike wouldn't turn. It crossed the lane I was in, the lane of incoming traffic, and the berm. I came very close to going over the 13,000 foot drop. Mike came off his bike after me screaming... "You were looking where you didn't want to go! Always keep your eye on where you want to go!" What you learn in stable daily practice is how to stabilize attention on where you want to go – straight into the heart of God.

I've also learned a lot from my dogs. My sheepdog Nancy would sit down in front of the door and stare at the knob. Eventually, I would get up and open the door for her. Thank you Nancy, I'm going to stare at God all day long and do my very best to breathe His spirit into this body. ☸

For this monthly column, we will hear from various elders in our contemplative community for our own growth and transformation. Tim's sharing will continue in next month's issue.

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## GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* recommends reading this spiritual journey principle three times in the method of Lectio Divina.

### GUIDELINE 40

Human effort depends on grace even as it invites it.  
Whatever degree of divine union we may reach bears  
no proportion to our effort.  
It is the sheer gift of divine love.



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# LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

## PRIDE AND VANITY BY NATHAN JONES

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**Work Idea:** It is said in this Work that there are two giants that walk in front of us and arrange everything beforehand: Pride and Vanity. Pride and Vanity have different tastes, offer different feelings, and get triggered in different ways. The difference feels slight at first, like a musician changing the key at the end of a song while fading out. Some subtle differences are: Vanity may make a picture of oneself and Pride will defend it. Pride may prevent me from admitting a mistake, while Vanity cringes when I know I've made a mistake.

**Work Source:** "One may know theoretically about them without having the slightest idea how they manifest themselves in oneself. Everyone has their own forms of Vanity and Pride which differ in different cases and you must remember that they seem quite reasonable, quite natural, so that people do not notice them. Both Pride and Vanity are connected with self-love but although they have this connection their manifestations can be quite different so that one opposes the other—for instance, you are paid a compliment and your Vanity is delighted but your Pride makes you

feel awkward. On the whole people were agreed in their answers that Vanity is based on the unreal part of us, but that Pride is connected with something real." Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 357.

**Application:** There is a notion that Pride can be useful when turned internally whereas Vanity is always false. It is true that Vanity is closely associated with Imagination whereas Pride is significantly less so. There is gold here. Additionally, reflect that Vainglory is an archaic synonym of Vanity. Vainglory originally meant *considering one's own capabilities and that God's help was not needed*. "Do you know your own forms of Vanity and how much they occupy you? Do you know where your Pride lies? Where do you feel that you love yourself, that you admire yourself? Where do you most feel that you are utterly different from other people? Where are you most conceited? What do you boast about? What are you silent about? Vanity is frequently very talkative, whereas Pride is silent." Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 360.

**Further Resource:** "Now the person is thought to be proud who thinks

themselves worthy of great things, being worthy of them; for those who do so beyond their deserts is a fool, but no virtuous person is foolish or silly. The proud person, then, is the human we have described. For those who are worthy of little and think themselves worthy of little is temperate, but not proud; for pride implies greatness ... On the other hand, they who think themselves worthy of great things, being unworthy of them, is vain; though not everyone who thinks themselves worthy of more than they really are worthy of is in vain. The human who thinks himself worthy of less than he is really worthy of is unduly humble, whether his deserts be great or moderate ... If, then, they deserve and claim great things, and above all the great things, they will be concerned with one thing in particular. Desert is relative to external goods; and the greatest of these, we should say, is that which we render to the gods, and which people of position most aim at, and which is the prize appointed for the noblest deeds; and this is honor; that is surely the greatest of external goods." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3 

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## OUR MONTHLY PRACTICE: STILLNESS

Our monthly practice for the month of May is stillness. Like April's practice of silence, stillness is both a fruit of silence and also a womb to birth more silence in one's life. Early Christian monks such as Evagrius of Ponticus and John Cassian deeply valued stillness and taught its vital role in one's spiritual progress.

The Greek word for stillness is *hesychia*, which conveys a quality of quiet retreat from the busyness and noise of external life. Thus, those who practice stillness came to be called *Hesychasts*, which was a short-hand way of speaking of one who practiced interior prayer, or what the early Christian monks called the prayer of the heart, or ceaseless prayer, or what is today often referred to simply as The Jesus Prayer.

Stillness has often been referred to as both the means and the end of one's spiritual practice of prayer. As one grows in interior silence and stillness, it's as if the mind descends into the heart. Stillness is very much an embodied experience, one that can be sensed and cultivated by way of sensing exercises, such as body scanning or bringing attention to one part of your body – such as your hands, hip-socket, or solar plexus. A further quality of the practice of stillness is a sense of emptiness. This quality of emptiness was often further enhanced by a life of solitude that further nurtured stillness and silence.

For us today, we can learn wisdom from these wise monks of the third and fourth centuries. We can find a place in our home, or at a nearby park, and take time to rest the body using the practice of stillness. Soften your gaze. Slow your breath. Quiet your thoughts. Pause your body. Be with your body. Be in your body. Let the stillness sink into you and let yourself sink into the stillness. ☸

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## MAY SERMON THEMES

May 2	Community Reading Discussion on <i>Eye of the Heart</i>
May 9	Mimi Conroy and Matthew Pickett
May 16	Mary: The Heart of God, Part 1
May 23	Mary: The Heart of God, Part 2
May 30	Mary: The Heart of God, Part 3

## MAY CALENDAR

For more details, visit [consciouharmony.org](http://consciouharmony.org) or call 512-347-9673

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
May 5 2-6pm Register on website  
In person and online options

Centering Prayer Workshop led by Jim Reale  
May 22 9am-3pm \$25 Register on website  
“Creating a Relationship w/Your Body & Breath”

Adult Baptism online classes  
May 1-22 Saturdays, 9-10:30am  
Preregister with office.

Youth Baptism online classes  
May 1-22 Saturdays, 11am  
Preregister with office.

### MONTHLY

#### Caritas Donations

To continue our long standing partnership, please consider making a donation of food or money directly to [caritasofaustin.org](http://caritasofaustin.org)

### WEEKLY

#### Sundays

- \*Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
- \*Intercessory Prayer 9am
- †^Worship Service 10-11:30am
- \*\*Youth Program 1pm

#### Wednesdays

- †Contemplative Worship Service 6:30-7:15pm

#### Thursdays

- \*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

#### Saturdays

- \*Scriptorium 11am
- \*Compline 9-9:15pm

### DAILY

- \*Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

\*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video conferencing. Contact the website for accessible links and more information.

† Open for in-person in CCH sanctuary

^ Sign up online to attend in person

\*\* Contact [youthdir@consciouharmony.org](mailto:youthdir@consciouharmony.org) for code



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## THE MYSTERY OF THE ASCENSION AND THE GRACE OF PENTECOST



*This is the day the Lord has made,  
let us be glad and rejoice in it!*

Psalm 118:24



Each feast of the Liturgical Year is both an event to be celebrated and a grace to be received. ...

The cosmic Christ, revealed in the Mystery of the Ascension, manifests our true self and the inner nature of all reality.

What is manifested is the living, vibrant Spirit, filling us and all things with boundless light, life and love.

The Spirit is always present, yet always coming. That is because the Divine actuality becomes present in a new way each time we move to a new level of spiritual awareness. ...

What then is the special grace of Pentecost? ... To know that Christ is all in all and to know his Spirit, the ongoing promise of the Father – this is the grace of Pentecost. ...

We are in God and God is in us, and the unifying force is the Spirit. To live in the Spirit is the fulfillment of every law and commandment, the sum of every duty to each other, and the joy of oneness with everything that is.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*