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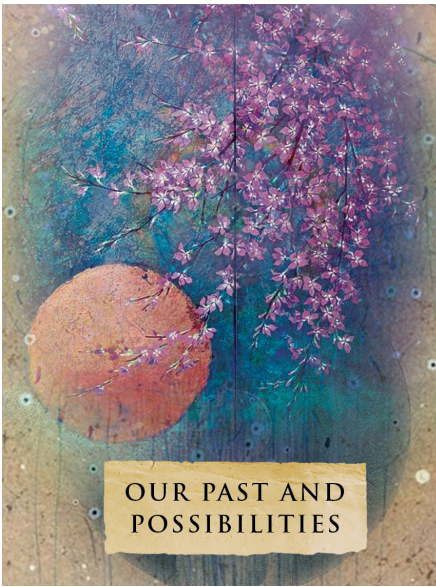


The Mark

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



OUR PAST AND
POSSIBILITIES



Holy, holy, holy ... the whole earth is filled with God's glory! Isaiah 6:3

ANNUAL AIM: HOLY REMEMBERING

OUR PAST AND OUR POSSIBILITIES BY PETER HAAS

All three lines are necessary.
The first is work on oneself. ...
The first line of Work is to make us know our state of being and state of knowledge. ...
The second line of Work is work in conjunction with other people in the Work. Unless you practice the first line of Work you cannot practice the second. Again, unless you practice the second, you cannot practice the first rightly. ...
The third line of Work is – for us at present – to help the Work in general and try to see what is required of us and not talk wrongly or harm the Work. Right valuation and right attitude to the Work belong to the third line, but they enter into everything ...

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*,
“The Three Lines of Work,”
September 29, 1943

*But take care and watch yourselves closely,
so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen
nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life;
make them known to your children
and your children's children.*

Deuteronomy 4:9

Our theme this month is “Our Past and Our Possibilities.” It is a fitting theme given the news that after much prayer and counsel, I have discerned that I have played my part at The Church of Conscious Harmony and that the Spirit has led me to complete my tenure as your minister. Given that decision, I accepted a new pastoral call to serve a Presbyterian church beginning the first of this month.

It has been a privilege to serve The Church of Conscious Harmony community as minister for the past six years. I feel joy in how we have grown together. Some of the many highlights I give thanks for include moving through the retirement

of CCH's founders, co-creating The Journey School, evolving the Sunday liturgy, navigating Covid-19, integrating more audio/visual/technology solutions for a global community, and expanding classes, retreats, volunteers, and teachers. From every vantage point, it seems to me that this Church is healthy and growing.

You might be wondering why I made this decision now. In brief, this year of Holy Remembering for me has also been a year of Holy Returning. I have been impressed by the Holy Spirit to a revived reverence for the authority and centrality of the Bible in my life and ministry. The prospect of such

a return is bittersweet. While it brings me deep joy to return to the Bible as the sole basis of my pastoral teaching, I will always cherish the spiritual journey we have shared.

Looking forward, I believe this is a growing moment for CCH. I am confident that you will grow as a Church family as you each participate in this important transitional journey. As the future draws nearer, meaningful possibilities await. You will call a new minister. You will flourish together. You will deepen in your love for God and one another. You will discover so much about yourselves and what the Church and School can become through this process. I am excited to see the blessings that await this unique and important spiritual community. And so, I bless you on your journey and I pray you bless me on mine.

I find our Lord Jesus' words a fitting conclusion for such a moment as this:

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. John 14:25-27

With gratitude to all! ☺

TOUCHED BY GRACE BY MARY ANNE BEST

*Come to know the One in the presence before you,
and everything hidden will come to be revealed.*

Gospel of Thomas, Logion 5

Autumn stands apart. Trees drop their leaves; their roots begin to burrow into the ground. The lush of spring and the heat of summer give way to Nature's austerity. In harmony with this cycle, we too are called to let go of our encumbrances, all that is superfluous and nonessential in our lives. Now especially, we are in a time of deep listening and quiet prayer, yet confident in the Presence that will reveal all that is ours in the fullness of time.

In this Work, we are to live as a bridge between Heaven and Earth. Maurice Nicoll tells us:

“There are two lives that you can lead. After a time you begin to know what the other life means that you can lead in yourself which the Work can form in you, and you can distinguish it from the life of the ordinary affairs of the day. Eventually you should be living in both. They gradually should cease to be in opposition to each other.” (*Commentaries*, Vol. 2, p. 543)

This may sound like theory, but we can be assured that it is true. Life and the Work, the whole spiritual journey, are not in opposition, rather on different planes. These planes are always present and available to us. Dr. Nicoll assures us in another Commentary:

“Nowadays people wish to make Heaven on Earth. ... For [human] kind to change, for a better state of things, each man, each woman, must begin to work on themselves and try to awaken from sleep – in such words did Gurdjieff many times indicate the *conditions* necessary for things to become better on this deep-down and unimportant planet.” (Vol. 3, p. 1125)

The Kingdom of Heaven is not only after death but is available here for those who are able to be in a state of Self-remembering. When taking in impressions, what usually happens? They meet our associations. When we *remember* to consciously take them in a new way, they will emit a very fine energy and it will breathe through us, through the atmosphere around us, through our community, and into our world.

May it be soon that we each know this and live into it. With you in prayer and love.... ☺

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

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

REMEMBERING EARTH

BY DONALD GENUNG

It occurs to me often how blessed I am to be living on this planet. Much of this sentiment is because many of my peak experiences and mystical introductions have been while in nature. When holding Earth in mind, it is practical to include the magical array of floral, fauna, terrain, changing weather conditions, starry skies, and such that are interwoven into our experiences of life on Earth.

The deep and special affection for our planet has been with me from my earliest memories. I was raised in a rural setting in the northeast. We had four distinct seasons to live through, endure in some ways and enjoy in other ways. Much of the area was dairy farms and simple folks who wanted to live close to nature. Like many, for a time we had acreage and were subsistence farmers having cows, pigs, and chickens, gardening much of our food and using firewood for supplemental heating. Along with

the corn fields and hay fields were scatterings of ponds and acres of hardwood trees for logging and hunting. This was my playground and the places where I felt most at peace. It was also the setting for many mystical experiences. Being a member of the Boy Scouts until college provided another venue for traveling to different natural areas for communing in nature through exploration, learning, play and experiencing the Divine.

Meanwhile, I was primarily educated in parochial schools, being bused into the nearest city. The odd component to this is that there was no context or formation offered that connected my mystical experiences in nature to the catechism I was being taught. Somehow, I knew there surely must be more to it. Over time, I have come to see that these times and experiences were the beginning of my contemplative yearnings.

My earliest mystical experiences

were while playing in the areas, small fields and woodlands around the barn and chicken coop. It was a beautiful vista. I recall meandering, just exploring whatever my attention went to. It was early summer. The area was teeming with life. There were different things to explore all around me. It was quiet, as it often was. While gazing through all that was there, a strange “presence” came to my young mind and filled my soul with joy. This presence was not any specific form or physicality or anywhere. Rather, all nature seemed to exist in it. I was at peace in this mystery while experiencing a child’s wonder. Life appeared as “one” amidst all the unique life forms, soil, air, sky, and Sun. The “seeing” of this mystical oneness was pre-intellectual. My mind was not developed enough to have concepts on what was being experienced. But some part of my awareness was relating to this connectedness with all of nature around me.

This experience was infrequent, though I looked for it often when alone in nature. However, upon seeing this a second time, a part of me knew it was present, whether I could see it or not. Later in life, I came to see these experiences described as expressions of God's Omnipresence. It gave real context to the expression, where is God not!

As I grew and moved up in grades, the movement from God's Omnipresence were followed by mystical experiences of God's innate unique presence in nature. It was a movement from the general to the particular.

I recall first seeing the Divine emanating from individual forms of life. Specifically, the first memory was within a dear dog, Boots, a beagle. I was sitting by a creek petting Boots and looking into his eyes. There was a new experience of "seeing" of the Divine emanating through Boots, to the point where all that was known was this Presence. The name and familiarity with Boots temporarily faded as a point of reference. This happened again with a quirky rooster who was evasive but would come nearer if I could sit still. Eye contact was the portal. Though my experiences were with pets, through conversations with others about their spiritual journeys, this Presence has been experienced in many ways outside the animal kingdom. It could be

through a flower, a tree, a flowing river or whatever.

While there was something *in* me that could see and know the Divine coming into my senses, I simply did not have the mental development at such a young age to realize this.

These experiences and other peak experiences were the foundation of my desire for more time in nature and a love for Earth. I also relate these experiences to the awakening of magnetic center as described in the Work of Inner Christianity and a desire for more. Due to this wonderful upbringing in nature, I pursued an undergraduate degree in education, emphasizing the environmental sciences and a graduate degree in outdoor teacher education, focusing on using the out-of-doors as a classroom. My first job was as a naturalist.

Approximately ten years after college and drifting from church to church, I met Br. Wayne Teasdale. Br. Wayne was residing at the Hundred Acres Monastery in New Hampshire. He was steeped in nature mysticism at this remote, rural monastery. We shared accounts of our rural life histories, educations, and mystical experiences with God through nature. At the time, I could not cite my experiences as Christian, because they did not fit into the religious formation I had received. It was so exhilarating

to meet someone who could help contextualize my experiences in nature, put words on them and encourage me to continue to pursue the contemplative dimension of Christianity. Br. Wayne termed the experiences described above as God's Omnipresence and Immanence.


Further light was shed on these experiences by Bernadette Roberts. While at The Church of Conscious Harmony giving a retreat called "The Essence of Christian Mysticism," she so clearly covered mystical experiences in nature of God's Omnipresence and separately, God's Immanence. She described these as the most common experiences early in the spiritual journey.

I also recall her saying that there is no need to try to intellectually integrate these two unique experiences. The rationale is that there is a tendency to conclude God is Omnipresent because God is Immanent in nature, thus downplaying or excluding God's Omnipresence. Or visa-versa. They are totally distinct. It was satisfying to learn this. I had pondered often why I could not seem to infuse the two together without something being diminished.

Perhaps experiences such as these are common for many of us who enjoy special, solitary times basking in Earth's glorious nature.

From conversations with other contemplatives, having mystical experiences through nature seems to be a common phenomenon early in our lives and has attracted us to live close to nature.

These experiences have been processed further through the cosmology ideas of the Work. When first reading, I was immediately attracted to the concepts of the Great Ray of Creation, emanating from God the Absolute through all galaxies, to all stars, and to all planets everywhere. Further clarifying the Divinity of all creation was the idea of a second octave emanating from the Sun, coding (my words) and coating all life on Earth. The wisdom of the Work expressed through Mr. Nicoll is to verify everything with your own experience. While I am not able to use the scientific method to verify the truth of the cosmic octaves, the mystical experiences described resulted in a faith in God that transcends understanding. The cosmology was a missing link to integrating my mystical experiences with the Trinity.

A final reflection on God's gifts through life on Earth is that these mystical experiences naturally pointed to the presence of God indwelling as an essential frontier to experience in the spiritual journey. The depths of possibilities of Self-Remembering in this light seem gloriously endless. 

SCRIPTORIUM

A NEW CREATION BY PETER HAAS

This month's scripture is taken from the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 17-18:


So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation ...

Our theme this month is "Our Past and Possibilities." If there is one scripture in the New Testament that speaks to this subject of contrasting our past to our future, it is likely *this* scripture. Let's explore some reasons why.

First, the phrase "a new creation" is a vivid and powerful declaration of what we are in Christ, whether we know it or not. The Greek word for new is *kainos* and conveys not just newness, but freshness, as in a fresh opportunity for development, or of an unused or new quality.

An image that conveys this idea of new freshness is the tender leaves of a tree newly leafing out to the sun in Spring. This is literally a new, fresh leaf, ready to grow, to develop, to be all that it can be. And it is new because it is connected to the branch, which is connected to the tree, which is connected to the ground of its being through its roots. The tree is not the ground, but the ground makes the tree and all its leaves possible.

Second, the new *creation* that arises is better translated as a new creature – or a new being. And this is qualified even further by the next phrase which boldly claims not only that the new has come, but also simultaneously that the *old has passed away!* This is incredible! This is the goodness of the good news: anyone in relationship with the living Christ (the tree), is a participant in the new creation that God (the Ground) accomplished through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and also the decisive guarantee that the old or former parts or aspects of oneself are no longer in control, indeed, they are now totally irrelevant, out of sight, void and to be disregarded.

A simple analogy of this new creation reality is that our life is now in a new season, tended by a faithful gardener who prunes us so to stimulate ever further growth and new possibilities. 

But whenever you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING PRAYER

STILLNESS AND THE HEART

BY WHITNEY ELLISE MCFALL

Looking back, I can see that the draw to worship had primarily been an intellectual pursuit. My default mode can be head-heavy, with a large appetite to compare and contrast ideas, thus the study of Scripture, mystics, philosophy and psychology have suited me. My draw to The Church of Conscious Harmony came at first through the book *Meditations on the Tarot*, where I found my way to classes studying this book on campus. There, I heard reference to the *Commentaries*, where community members fed me ideas about “multiplicity,” “knowledge and being,” and “man as a self-developing organism.” The ideas in the *Commentaries*, also known as “the Work of Inner Christianity,” was a perfect fit – a psychological system of inquiry that was linked with Contemplative Christianity! Compelled to know and to do, I immediately began the journey into this vast body of

knowledge. The year that followed, a quiet grace would come into focus. One that continues to transform my typical head-driven pursuit into an experience of Presence, containing within it a potential beyond any cerebral capacity. Centering Prayer requires stillness and devotion; it is a simple yet dynamic practice.

As a child, I had experienced a deep entanglement with Presence and have always carried it with me, but my focus drifted as I moved out on my own. This sense I knew from my youth would always visit in nature, on a starry night or in the cloud-filled New Mexico skies. And, of course, always made an appearance when the world had me begging for mercy on my knees. Though I knew this Presence intimately, its manifestation was always fleeting and spontaneous. I never intentionally accessed it, nor did I realize the potential of sustaining and deepening the

connection. That is until I was introduced to the delight-filled Fr. Thomas Keating through the pilot Journey School program, marking a turn in the direction from a solely intellectual quest into an exploration of Stillness. I was faced with the importance of a twice-daily Practice where I was to empty myself and “Consent to the Silence of God’s Love.” Here the opportunity presented itself as a turn inward to discover a state where I could rest the constant aimless trail of mental associations. An opportunity to rediscover and embrace the relationship I once had as a child with Presence, and instead of the continual work on Knowledge, a chance to surrender to Being.

With a firm appreciation for order, I have always been one to follow rules, specifically ones that agree with the feeling of what is “right.” When given the guidelines,

that of *Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work), I followed the prescription. As a lifelong observer, the Work ideas were a powerful addition and infused my being with new energy. The practice of Centering Prayer took a much slower pace, as I have been well conditioned to run mental obstacle courses but had little to no training on how to quietly center my being. I would go from being relatively consistent to completely forgoing it for days, then a solid morning practice, but the second sit was relatively amiss. This went on for quite a while. Then something shifted, and I was faced with a deeper truth. A phrase that had been etched into my heart as a child, began to open itself through this dual track of *Ora et Labora*: “*Thy Will Be Done.*” At this point, the practice of the Work revealed to me a particular impression of my-will-being-done. The observation of contradictory parts of my personality (the multiplicity) that were not harmonious and, in fact, could quite easily cause a “justified” stir. The wish, to live in congruence with Truth, has always been at the core of my existence, however my awareness of just how far I was from the heart-of-the-matter and

how my mind was fixed spinning its own self-protective truth had become apparent.

As I observed my habits, the significance of *Thy Will Be Done* began to take on a new meaning. The wish arose to consent to something larger than myself, to consent to *the* Truth, not *my* truth. I had taken a “photograph” of myself one particular evening where I’d spent more than an hour on the internet with my face illuminated by the light of the screen. Feeling “too tired” to sit in prayer before bed, I heard myself say, “If I cannot even sacrifice 20 minutes to the silence, how am I to live the will of God?” A whole album of photographs flooded my mind where I had given countless hours of time to the screen. I saw how this practice did not open me to the Presence of God but kept me trapped in a mental loop of inputs regarding nearly useless information. At that moment I knew if I wanted to go deeper, I had to focus my attention in a new way and feed my energy into something that was free from the illusion of this age. Called to sacrifice idle time, to allow something useful and alive to enter, I had with me in that moment a

distinct awareness that Centering my being in the Silence was the gateway to living this Truth.

By relying on external sources and my own understanding to navigate I was caught in an endless loop, placed before a door with no key to enter. After all, the head ends at the neck and to proceed beyond a certain point, the capacity to be fully present, embodied, and receptive is necessary. Through Centering Prayer, the flow of energy changes and the indwelling wellspring of Presence begins to stir, awakening life from the inside out. From this place, an opening and capacity to move beyond the constrictions of our conditioning emerges. The cultivation of being in the silence beckons transformation on a different scale, one that does not count, measure, or weigh – one that simply opens the heart to the Grace of God. There are layers of myself that are not penetrated, places I have just glimpsed. And no additional information will help me encounter them, only by releasing what I “know” into the silence. To allow the Peace of the Most High. To Remember.

Come Holy Spirit Come, be in me according to Thy Will. ☉

THE WORKSHOP

FREEDOM FROM AND FREEDOM FOR

Here in the Workshop, we ponder a question submitted by a participant of The Journey School. Each month, the Workshop will aim to answer a question directly related to someone's experience applying Work ideas to their life in a practical way.

QUESTION:

What does the Work mean by the word "Being" and relatedly, what does "Work on Being" look like in day-to-day life?


REPLY:

Being is a technical term in the Work, with unique aspects. But we can start with a general understanding of the word. First, we can likely see that there are different ways and types of being. For example, a human being is different than other kinds of beings – such a horse. A human has human beingness and a horse has horse-beingness. In the Work, the word Being conveys not just existence, but also how one exists, as in what state or form one exists psychologically.

Second, this is a good intersection with the Work's technical use of the term Being. In the Work, Being is a quality that can be developed, that can evolve. As a result, while many people can have the same kind of existence, they might also have different levels of Being. The Work posits that there are different states and/or levels of Being that one can Work toward as a self-developing being. Different influences feed this development of Being, so for instance, wisdom teaching and sacred scriptures feed one level of Being and sports and news feed a different level of Being.

Third, applied to day-to-day life, the Work invites us to think of the development of our Being as another way of talking about our psychological transformation and maturation. By way of Self-observation, we can see our Being mirrored in our conversation, in our emotions, in our thoughts. Being is the fruit of our thinking, feeling and embodiment. And in that way, Being is a word that sums up the totality of oneself or personhood.

That said, Being is more than the sum of the parts of our personality, DNA, lineage, history, IQ, and other manifestations of human existence. So, it's no wonder that the Work urges us to recognize that Being is a good place to look if we are wondering why we do the things we do, or why the same types of things keep happening to us. Being is a kind of intangible magnet that tends to draw to what our Being is at any given moment or season in our life. Thus, if one's Being is bent toward anger, notice how that might be drawing more anger or friction into your life experiences and relationships.

In sum, according to the Work, Being is a kind of dimension or dynamic in us that has the potential to grow, develop and shape the totality of our lifetime – every second, every day. 

To submit a question for consideration to the Workshop, please email: tjs@consciousharmony.org.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE VISIT A NEW PLACE

Our community practice, which continues through October, is visiting a new place. Perhaps in line with our recent enrichment weekend, try the desert – or at least a place of vastness. If you live near Austin, one suggestion is to drive west, past Enchanted Rock or Llano and begin to notice the desert-like vastness. Whichever unfamiliar place(s) you choose to visit, feel what the space and light and textures convey to you. Get out of the vehicle to fully observe and listen. Notice the sounds. The stillness. The vastness. How does a new place impact perception? Emotion? Memories? Take it in intellectually, emotionally, physically, instinctively. With this visceral, internal snapshot, observe and explore what is revealed. ☺

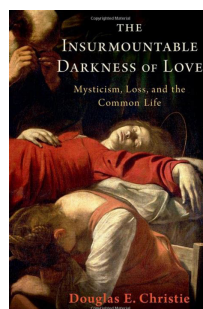
COMMUNITY READING

The Insurmountable Darkness of Love by Douglas E. Christie

OCTOBER SERMON SERIES REMEMBER GOD

October 1	Remember God's Promises
October 8	Remember God's Revelations
October 15	Remember God's Love
October 22	Remember God's Plan
October 29	Remember God's Faithfulness

BOOK LOOK



The Insurmountable Darkness of Love

In the afterglow of Douglas E. Christie's visit, it is safe to suggest that Christie may be one of the most important scholars of contemplative and monastic spirituality of this generation. We again draw your attention to his work. His books are essential reading for anyone interested in deepening their knowledge and understanding of the contemplative and monastic streams within the long enduring Christian traditions. Dr. Christie serves as professor in the Theological Studies Department at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. His most recent book, *The Insurmountable Darkness of Love: Mysticism, Loss and the Common Life* is a masterpiece of introspective spiritual autobiography that also teaches the wisdom of the contemplative monastic tradition in very accessible ways. His prior book, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, is a treasure chest of wisdom integrating contemplative practices and nature. Enjoy! ☺

OCTOBER CALENDAR

For more details, visit consciousharmony.com or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

❖ New Member Classes

Sundays, Oct 1-22 noon-1pm Register online

Conscious Gathering of Women led by Jill Frank and Deborah Hale
Oct 6-8 at Camp of the Hills
\$200 Contact the office to be placed on the waitlist

❖ Sacred Embodiment Centering Prayer Retreat, with Sharon Johnson
Oct 14 9am-4pm Register online by 10/12 \$30

†A Sacred Evening of Gurdjieff Music, Scripture, and Readings
Honoring Women of the Work
Oct 15 6pm

Welcoming Prayer Online Workshop
Oct 27-28 Register online

MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations

Bring non-perishables to CCH or donate to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

Wednesdays

❖ Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm

Saturdays

* Online Centering Prayer Support Group 7:35am

Sundays

† Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am

❖ Intercessory Prayer in Room 211 9:15-9:30am

† Worship Service 10-11:30am

❖ Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

Thursdays

* The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

DAILY

† Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

* Centering Prayer 6-6:20pm



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*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video options.
Contact the website for accessible links and more information.
†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH



THE CHURCH *of*
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ICONS OF GOD

Creation is not a one-time event.
It's always happening, and in a sense, being in God
is always becoming. Becoming what? Everything,
because He's constantly producing everything.
Human consciousness is really God experiencing
human consciousness and that means that we're
a kind of icon of God

... and this is why humans are so important
and so dignified,
because God dwells in them.

Thomas Keating, *Interview with Rick Archer, January 19, 2013*

*When I look at the heavens, the work of Your hands,
at the moon and stars You set in place –
What is man that You should be mindful of him?
Woman that You should care for her?
Yet You made them little less than gods,
You crowned them with glory and honor,
gave them dominion over the work of Your hands,
set all things under their feet.*

cf. Psalm 8:4-7

