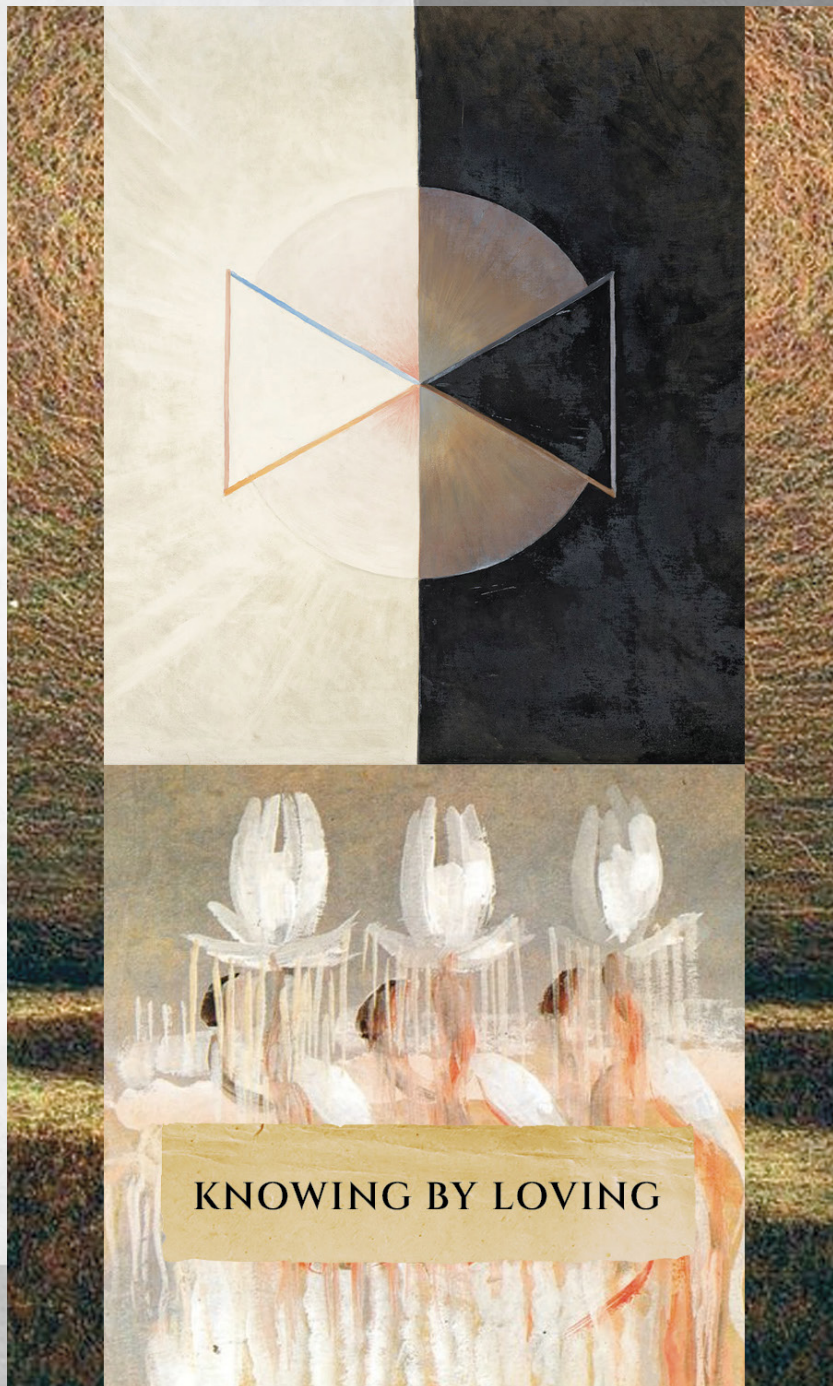


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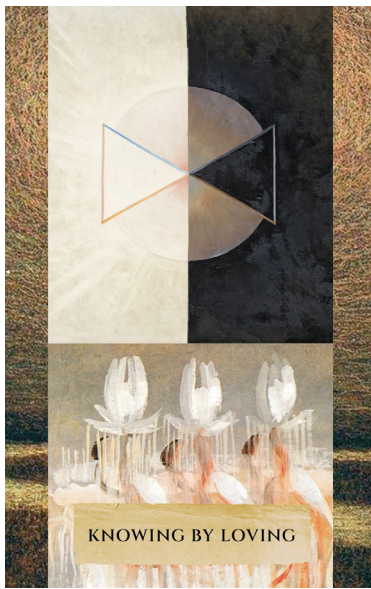


The Mark

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



KNOWING BY LOVING



... *then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.* 1 Corinthians 13:12

ANNUAL AIM: HOLY UNKNOWING

KNOWING BY LOVING BY KARLY PITMAN

Remember you come here
having already understood
the necessity of struggling
with yourself – only with yourself.
Therefore, thank everyone who
gives you the opportunity.

Aphorism inscribed in a special script above
the walls of the Study House at Gurdjieff's
Institute for the Harmonious Development
of Man

Ought we not
to love dearly the neighbor, who
truly represents to us
the sacred Person of our Master?
And is this not
one of the most powerful motives
we could have
for loving each other
with an ardently burning love?

St. Francis de Sales

*Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God,
and he who loves is born of God and knows God.*

1 John 4:7

For many years, a Rumi saying
has been my companion: “Your
task is not to seek for love, but to
seek and find all the barriers within
yourself that you have built against
it.” I recognized this thirst – how
I longed to love others, the world,
and to feel love within myself. But
there were many barriers.

I grew up on the shores of Lake
Erie in an evangelical Christian
family that carried both love and
trauma, a complex heritage. I
was a sensitive, porous child who
easily absorbed the world around
me, and often felt frightened and
overwhelmed. One of my earliest
memories, at age three or four, is
praying before bed, asking Jesus
into my heart. Worried that the
prayer was not enough, I prayed

night after night trying to find rest.

I left for college with my
first eating disorder and soon
after, experienced a debilitating
depression. I graduated feeling
damaged and broken. For decades,
these internal protectors (eating
disorders and depression) lived
alongside my thirst for God.
Holding the tension of these
opposites was confusing – I didn't
understand how they could coexist.
I tried to resolve the tension by
eliminating my “darkness,” thinking
if I cured my trauma I could live in
the light.

Throughout my 20s and 30s,
yoga, Buddhism, Sufism, the Divine
Mother and later, contemplative
Christianity, brought some peace.
But even as I meditated, I felt driven

to create a more “loveable self.”

Twelve years ago, I began studying with a mentor in developmental psychology that would take me deep into the human journey. The night before my first class, I sat on a grassy hillside under the warm Austin moon and cried, surrendering my spiritual ideals, letting go of my dream of a “healed,” awakened self. Perhaps I was going backwards – but I could no longer shun the vulnerability that lived underneath my pain.

Three months later, my studies sent me into a spiritual crisis, weeping for help: “Pierce my heart, God. Help me to know it’s safe to be loved.” My mentor had given me the gift of seeing myself through his gentle eyes: it did not feel safe to trust others or something greater than myself. I longed for love and felt terrified of it. With a thud of insight, I knew I could not have prevented my eating disorders if I had tried. Through this love, compassion for myself moved from a cognitive knowing to a whole-body knowing, which left me curled in child’s pose weeping in my bathroom, flooded with tenderness, willing to be loved by something beyond food.

We are opened by great love and great pain, and I felt both that night. I feel grateful for my journey with food, anxiety and depression,

for our wounds connect us into wholeness with each other. The love of others softens the ways I feel separate. The vulnerability of others softens harshness towards myself. Our vulnerabilities soften places of hardness in others. We are a mutually softening society, where we love more deeply as we are loved.

A friend taught me a beautiful phrase that says this well: “May I listen with the ears of my heart to the other voices of myself speaking.” I imagine the table in the 23rd Psalm similarly, as welcome for every part of ourselves and others: *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*. Stephen Jenkinson taught me that “enemy” comes from the Old French *Amee*, “beloved,” which comes from *amer*, to love. By adding -en, you get this: “the friend who has not yet known love.” Which makes me wonder.... Who are the enemies inside me that have not yet known love? Who are the enemies in the “other voices of myself” who have not been loved? Where does my table need to stretch into greater welcome? Who have I barred from the feast?

“Nothing is possible in love without death,” Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee says. In loving others (and the exiled parts of myself), I am asked to die to the illusion that anything separates me from another person. Sometimes

what dies is the story in my head about another. Sometimes the dying is my heart cracking open: “Help me to understand what I don’t yet understand. Help me to see what I don’t yet see. Help me to love what I don’t yet love.” Bearing love is also dying. When I bear others’ love, I die to an illusion that God’s love is all I need. But if I want to feel whole, I must let others love me too.

I think loving is seeing – bending our ears to hear the song of another, listening for the deeper story. When I love others, my heart opens – softening internal shoulds, fears, preferences, concepts and beliefs. I empty, kneeling at the manger of who is before me, waiting as a midwife to see the Christ child that’s being born in them.

This month’s quote of understanding “the necessity of struggling with yourself...” helps me rest in the process and open to my poverty, times when I feel unloving. Struggling to love or not wanting to love are necessary for the journey – how I live into what I agreed to do.

Recently, I heard the missing ending to the Rumi quote that stirred my heart: “Your task is not to seek for love, but to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it – and to embrace them.” Of course, the answer to a fear of love is love. ☺

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

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

A SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN LOVE BY TIM COOK

Originally published in *The Mark*, October 2009, this article beautifully aligns with our monthly theme. It has been edited to fit this space.

The founder of the Western monastic tradition, St. Benedict, conceived of monasteries as schools of love. The Church of Conscious Harmony was founded as a monastery without walls, an ongoing manifestation and continuation of that same flame of Christian love. In very fact, our contemplative Church is a school of love.

As more and more of our members are touched by the mystical experience of God's right-now presence, we share more and more of our time, treasure and talents in the ongoing co-creation of this amazing community. The inspiration that moves us is the very same spirit that moved the apostles and the first century Christians as they struggled together in self-transcending efforts to build the early Christian communities into homes for the spirit of love. We have inherited the blessings from their efforts and are in our own generation renewing them and participating in the continuing evolution of the way human

beings work and live together.


No coercion, no visible reward, no threat of punishment inspires our community to make the tremendous efforts that go into the creation and maintenance of our Church home. Christian love does this. It may be inconceivable to those who have not experienced it, but it is perfectly obvious to those who have. It needs no explanation, no justification and no publicity. God's love is its own attraction and reward. It moves us as nothing else ever could, just as it has been moving and inspiring generation after generation of the human family for 2000 years.

What we are learning together, as we open to the contemplative level of the Gospels and the Christian religion, is that Christ is far more literal, present and active than most of us had ever dreamed. His invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God is not a promise of distant reward for good behavior, but a right now experience of the convincing, transforming touch of God's love. God wants us to know that we human beings have been created for love and that

our birthright and destiny is waiting to be discovered within us every single second. When we know what we are and who created us, our harmonious actions will follow without fail.

In our monastery without walls, we aim to give God our full attention in daily spiritual practice. We teach Centering Prayer and recommend every person who attends our Church learn the method, study the contemplative Christian tradition, and commit to twice-daily periods of silent communion with the God who is love. We also teach the powerful, transformative principles and insightful ideas of the Work of Inner Christianity to become aware of the unconscious, culturally derived aspects of our personalities that are habituated to the ways of the world. These are the parts of us that are programmed to continuously miss the mark.

Our school of love is not for spectators. We are a community of daily spiritual practice. Our ancient lineage invites each of us to catch fire and to support one another in the difficult choice of making God and His love the most important fact in our lives. God's love is good to hear about, good to believe in, good to wish for, and utterly transformative to experience.

One of my teachers gave me good advice ... "You keep the practice and practice keeps you." The whole world practices God's absence. Contemplatives practice His presence. 

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

THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

PRACTICE EXTERNAL CONSIDERING BY TAMARA FIELD

“Remember you come here
having already understood
the necessity of struggling
with yourself – only with yourself.
Therefore, thank everyone
who gives you the opportunity.”

Work Aphorism

One of the fundamental principles of the Work of Inner Christianity is that “man cannot do.” While this woman is often “active” and “mechanical,” there is something I can do – observe my mechanical self. I can observe the workings of different centers, the different ‘I’s in myself, and when I am trapped in negativity, identification, or internal considering.


At times, I observe mechanical, internal thoughts like, “How could she say that to me?” or “He should treat me better than that; doesn’t he know what I am going through?” In these situations, I have found the best Work tool to be external considering. By externally considering the person I perceive is wronging me, I can transmute those thoughts into more loving thoughts and feelings. Such as, “This is a beautiful child of God, and I do not know what they could be going through right now.” I can feel my level of being rising, and my love for them grows, and I can thank them for their help in transforming my emotional center.

From Maurice Nicoll’s

Commentaries, we are taught:

“The opposite to internal considering is external considering. External considering is thinking of others. It is one of the few things in the Work that we are actually told to do. We are told not to internally consider and not to have negative emotions, and so on, but we are told to externally consider just as we are told to remember ourselves.” (p. 257)

“The second line of Work has to do with other people and one’s attitude to them. This demands work on oneself also. It does not mean merely that you must endure the unpleasant manifestations of others—and remember that they have to endure yours—but it means rather the practice of external considering in general.” (p. 261)

“External considering requires conscious effort, whereas internal considering is mechanical—that is, it requires no effort but goes on by itself and grows by itself just as do negative emotions. In the Work, external considering does not spring from life-motives. That is why it requires conscious effort. You have to consider people whom, in life, you would probably not for a moment think of considering. It is this kind of external considering that can change the level of being.” (p. 262) 

For more on the Work teachings, please join the Thursday online classes hosted by The Journey School.



THE CHURCH of
CONSCIOUS HARMONY

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512-347-9673 512-347-9675 fax
www.consciousharmony.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James Adjan Mary Lea McAnally
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programdir@consciousharmony.org

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Deborah Hale, Children’s Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
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Don Hale, Youth Director
youthdir@consciousharmony.org
David Jenkins, Asst to Youth Director

OFFICE

Mon-Fri 10am-2pm
Donald Genung, Business Manager
bizmgr@consciousharmony.org
Tracy Greiner, Office Manager
officemgr@consciousharmony.org
Mark Caddell, Media Producer
mediapro@consciousharmony.org
James Adjan, Worship Team Coordinator
wtc@consciousharmony.org
Billie Woods, Music Director
musicdir@consciousharmony.org
Sue Young, Lead Vocalist

NEWSLETTER

Sandra Ely, Editor
garzaely@swbell.net
Carol Hagar, Design
carol.hagar@austintennisacademy.com



ONE LIFE

2011

A man, a woman, in this Work, must learn by self-observation that what they seem to be, what they pretend to be outwardly, is not what they are internally ... The outer and inner must conform eventually and become one – a unity. ... This is a first step.

Maurice Nicoll

... As we consent to the movement of the Spirit in our inmost being we connect at the deepest level with every member of the human race and indeed the whole of creation. ... This mystery of oneness enables us to develop a refined inward eye, and invites us to perceive the mystery of the Divine everywhere and in everything.

... That which is hidden from our senses and intellect becomes more and more transparent as our consciousness is being transformed. ... We participate in a more genuine life, the fullness of life in the Divine.

Thomas Keating

That they may all be one, as You, Father, are in me and I in You, may they also be one in us.

John 17: 21

FOUNDATIONS

BY MARY ANNE BEST

What if we lived a transparent life, where outer and inner were the same? What if we were convinced that we were grounded in the serenity of God? That all was meaningful, benign, complete, perfect, One? The invitation for 2011 was such: One Life.

On January 11, 2011, in Tim Cook's letter to the community, he stated: "I'm feeling different than I have in past years. Many of my friends have expressed the same kind of feeling: a sense of heightened expectancy not particularly threatening or promising. ... The directional changes that seem most noticeably prominent right now are moving toward increasing fragmentation and division; the very opposite of the Reality that all creation is One. ... This is the year to restore unity to our lives."

Then, as now, we were and are invited to prayerfully join in community for a time of intentional devotion and action to the One God

who is living us now.

The mystics tell us that the goal of prayer and the hidden life, which itself becomes more and more of a prayer, is "union with God." We have heard that phrase often – perhaps so often that the sense of its awe-fullness is lost. For what does union with God mean? It is not a nice feeling we get in devout moments, although it may include moments of joy unbounded. Union with God means every bit of our human nature transfigured in Christ, woven up into Christ's creative life and activity, absorbed into Christ's redeeming purpose, heart, soul, mind and strength while still in our ordinary life. So mysterious that in the end each man, each woman, may do anything to evade it, once they realize it means the end of their own ego self-realization.

Am I ready? Of course not. Yet, as Thomas Merton once noted: "The course of my life is set in this direction" And each time it does happen, it means that one of God's creatures has achieved its destiny. As Maurice Nicoll so eloquently said, "All of the hosts of heaven are waiting in breathless silence to see whether any man or woman, will take on this work, start on the path of the inner evolution of a new meaning, that alone explains our existence on this insignificant planet."

If not us, then who?

CORE FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS

Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation
by Thomas Keating

This book presents the Christian spiritual path in a way that is accessible to contemporary followers of Christ and highlights some recognizable landmarks and hidden obstacles along the journey. This practical book is for serious practitioners of Centering Prayer, and more particularly contemplative prayer for which it is a preparation. *Invitation to Love* articulates the stages of the process of spiritual growth and outlines how to develop a deeper relationship with God, so we may move from contemplation to action. (A)

The Church of Conscious Harmony recommends 23 books as essential reading for growth and transformation on the spiritual journey. Copies are on display in the Praxis Center. One core foundational book will appear in these pages each month.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER: PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

In this season of anticipated fragmentation and the expression of polarities, we are invited to practice solidarity in the deeply held belief that we are all inextricably connected to each other by something much greater than ourselves. In conscious harmony, may we practice seeing the world with eyes wide open, calling God into our awareness, keeping watch with Christ who is in all. May we remember there is no need to push our opinions or express opposition, rather welcome and affirm the One who is the heart of all creation. (A)

COMMUNITY READING

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER

The Mark by Maurice Nicoll is essential reading for everyone who is a student of the Fourth Way. It discusses hidden, higher meanings of the Gospels and sheds esoteric light on our spiritual transformation and the meaning of our existence. (A)

SUNDAY SERMON SERIES: ONENESS

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

During this autumn season of mystery and unknowing, please join us on Sundays at 10:00 a.m. to explore the many ways we can experience the reality of *Oneness* on our spiritual journey. (A)

OCTOBER CALENDAR

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

- ❖ 1/2-day Centering Prayer Retreat
Oct 2 1-4pm Register online
- ❖ Prayerful Movement (open to all)
Oct 2 4:30-5:30pm
- ❖ Welcoming Prayer Commuter Retreat
Oct 11-12 8:30am-4pm
Register online
- ❖ Introduction to Centering Prayer
Oct 12 8:30am-12:30pm +
4 followup Mondays 7-8:15pm on Zoom
Preregister by 10/11 \$15
- †New Member Classes
Sundays, Oct 6-27 noon-1pm
Nov 10 10am New Member Induction
Contact the office to register

❖ Men's Retreat
Navigating the Spiritual Journey Together
Oct 18-19 Register online

3-day Women's Retreat
Oct 25-27 at Camp of the Hills
Register online

MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations
Bring non-perishables to CCH
or donate to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

- Wednesdays
- ❖ Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm
†Contemplative Service 6-7pm
- Thursdays
- * The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm
- Fridays
- ❖ Communion Service in Sacristy 7:40am
- Saturdays
- * Centering Prayer Support Group 7:35am
- Sundays
- †Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
- ❖ Intercessory Prayer 9:30am Room 302
†Worship Service 10-11:30am
- ❖ Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am
- DAILY
- †Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am
* Centering Prayer 6-6:25pm

*Please join via online video options.
Contact the website for accessible links
and more information.

†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH



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ORDINARY TIME

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness;
they shall have their fill.*

Matthew 5:6

The primary sacrament of Christianity is
Jesus Himself.

A sacrament is a visible sign
of the invisible presence of grace;
it communicates and transmits
what it signifies.

Jesus transmitted what He signified,
divine love,
by His teaching and example.

... After Jesus,
the greatest sacrament is
another human being.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*