

April 2025
Volume 37
Number 4



The Mark

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



THE DYNAMISM OF BECOMING

IN NOMINE PATRIS, ET FILII, ET SPIRITUS SANCTI

BY JONATHAN STEELE

In making the sign of the Cross, we invoke the Trinitarian name of God and the metaphysical Law of Three that this Name is patterned upon. As taught in the Work of Inner Christianity, we affirm this pattern as the creative framework out of which we, and all manifestation, emerge in each moment. But, what meaning lies hidden in plain view each time we make this sign across our bodies?

Jesus' penultimate words, recorded in the Scriptures as he hung from the Cross, were: it is finished; or equivalently translated as, it is accomplished. For us, what is accomplished has become an invitation.

To enter the way of the Cross is to enter a path that leads to the same destination: a complete emptying of the self. As Bernadette Roberts puts it, "What began at the Incarnation was only finished on the Cross ... and, if this complete self-emptying is the way it went for Christ, this is also the way it will go for us, and if Christ ended empty of self, then we too end empty of self. ... As it went for Christ, so it goes for us."

The Cross is an arcanum, a sacred symbol, that reveals, reflects and shows the way of Christ as our way. Everytime we make the sign of the Cross and hear the prayer after Holy Communion, we affirm the way of the Living Christ as our way. This way is a path that empties us of self, and leads to higher satisfaction in the spiritual life. Whereby we recognize, like Christ, that we only possess something by means of freely giving it away.

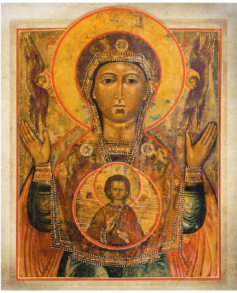
As Maurice Nicoll says about the Work, "When one's level of being increases, receptivity to higher meaning increases. As one's level of being decreases, the old meanings return." Transformational neutrality is non-existent for us. We either evolve or devolve, generate force or leak it, engage from presence or from sleep.

The Cross is a tripartite reflection of our inability to change, our invitation to change, and God's identification with our human condition. As we make the sign of the Cross, we invoke this meaning letting this pattern into

our minds, hearts and bodies. Or, do we? Is making the sign of the Cross an invitation to Self-remember in Christ or has it become religious habit?

Fr. Thomas Keating, in a teaching from 2009 in Austin, Texas, said, "God became identified with us in our human process of transitioning from the irresponsibility of the beasts to the freedom of choice, which leads to transformation. This is an expression of God's extreme hospitality." When we make the sign of the Cross, we invoke the inevitable accomplishment of the evolution of consciousness in remembering that we enter Christ's already accomplished work. We must simply consent to the way.

As the Lenten journey continues and the imminent impressions of Holy Week foment, let our devotion burn brighter than our habits. May the oblations of our bodily worship move us deeper into the mystery and wisdom of the Cross. We pray this in the name of God Transcendent, God Omnipresent and God Immanent. ☉



BLESSED
2016

FOUNDATIONS


BE BLESSED BY MARY ANNE BEST

Blessedness is defined by Webster's dictionary as "the state of being endowed with divine favor and protection" and "bringing pleasure or relief as a welcome contrast to what one has previously experienced." Who doesn't wish for pleasure and relief? Who wouldn't welcome divine favor and protection? Fr. Thomas Keating says that he regards the word blessed, as it is used in the Sermon on the Mount, to mean, "Oh how happy you will be!" Who wouldn't want to be the happiest we can be?

"That is why, this year we are aiming at being among those of the human race who are truly and deeply happy. In our world of increasing confusion and division, I invite you to join our entire Church of Conscious Harmony community, participating in the aim of being blessed. I pray that for each of us this will be an actually happy, actually blessed new year!" wrote Tim Cook in his letter to the community dated January 11, 2016.

Embracing the Beatitudes each month, we sought to realize

the prayer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in ourselves, "Since, by virtue of my consent, I have become a living particle of the Body of Christ, all that affects me must in the end help in the growth of the total Christ. Christ will flood into and over me and my cosmos, ... May my acceptance be ever more complete, more comprehensive, more intense! May my being, in its self-offering to You, become ever more open and more transparent to Your influence! And may I thus feel Your activity coming ever closer, Your presence growing ever more intense, everywhere around me. Amen."

As we travel this Lenten journey, may it be that we who are blessed be granted the grace, the wish, the energy to follow the journey of Christ through temptation, sacrifice and the cross unto resurrected life. Blessed are we who are learning to say "yes" to Love as the Way of Life. 

The monthly Foundations column revisits historical materials and perspectives that are significant to the foundational principles, aims and intentions that ground our Church's teachings, offerings and operations.



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
Mary Anne Best Tracey Stephens
Ken Ely Jackie Strashun
Donald Genung Stephen Utts

ABBESS

Mary Anne Best
abbess@consciousharmony.org

EMERITUS MINISTERS

Tim Cook (deceased) & Barbara Cook

DEVOTIONAL MINISTER

Jonathan Steele
devotionalmin@consciousharmony.org

THE JOURNEY SCHOOL

Mary Anne Best
tjs@consciousharmony.org

CENTERING PRAYER

Jill Frank, Program Director
programdir@consciousharmony.org

YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES

Deborah Hale, Children's Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
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
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



ANNUAL AIM: HOLY RECONCILING

THE DYNAMISM OF BECOMING BY GRETA GARDNER

In the Christian tradition,
prayer and contemplation
by which the mind
centers itself in God,
releasing control of its powers
and surrendering all thoughts
and feelings to God,
yields an awakening
of self in God and thus
a new consciousness
of God, self, and world.

Ilia Delio, *A Hunger for Wholeness*

*I appeal to you,
therefore, brothers and sisters,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living
sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship. Do
not be conformed to this world, but
be transformed by the renewal of
your mind, that by testing you may
discern what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 3:23

Conscience is the fire that alone can forge the unity we seek.

Waking up is possible only for those who want it and seek it.

G. I. Gurdjieff, *In Search of Being: The Fourth Way to Consciousness*, Stephen A. Grant, Editor

Becoming is dynamic, a continuous discovery of the new and novel. My “becoming” is aimed at opening myself to the practice and grounding of incarnation and through it, theosis, in order to become a more perfect vehicle of God’s intention in the manner of Christ. In the spiral of life, I have come around to witness my behaviors from new perspectives again and again, but with fresh insight and broadness of attitude that our Church teachings offer.

My magnetic center draws me to people and materials that broaden my understanding of higher realms of consciousness. But for the first 30 years of life, I never believed in God. To know that ordinary humans, like me, can experience gifts of grace and grow from them may allow others to prepare for and be aware of gifts of the Spirit as they occur. This takes intention, effort, and active

receptivity. The following are two occurrences of direct spiritual gifts that have permanently affected my being.

In 1982, I awoke from a dream, standing in the middle of my bedroom, saturated in Love. I say “I” except there was no Greta in that room. There was simply radiant energy illuminating the room together with an intensity of constant palpable vibration. There was a manifestation of movement as if every particle or molecule trembled with a greater consciousness whose focus was through the perceptions of what a witness would have called “G’s body,” but there was no body. Simply a denser aggregate of biologic energy and material acting as a transceiver for higher consciousness to perceive in a human way.

This consciousness permeated the receptacle of G and sang in her body,

undulating through brain cells and nerve endings. It perceived through G everything that was humanly possible. There was an unending, compassionate awareness extending past the known universe, infiltrating and resonating with everything living and dead. There was a total understanding of all creatures, events and situations. There was an extension of knowledge that answered every question, healed every moment.

Did I experience level six, Higher Intellectual Center, the unitive state? Truly, I was chosen for that moment as a portal through which God witnessed the universe, a special and sensate fingertip of the almighty. God incarnated in me. Eventually, my scientific personality prevailed. As I touched my journal to write down the experience, personality reground itself in identity and severed ties to the ethereal.

I was thunderstruck. My body still reverberated with absolute gratitude and awe. Like Paul, I had been knocked from the horse of my narrow, atheistic, unbelieving personality and had experienced the glory of God saturating my being. Instantaneously, my beliefs changed and my faith has never failed.

However, that unshakeable faith in God did not soften my personality. I remained highly logical, intellectual, generally divorced from my body and emotions, and unable to break free of negative habits and preferences.

Twenty-one years later, and after a five-month immersion at a silent, contemplative retreat house, I underwent a second spiritual gift of grace that continued for the next six months. I was overwhelmed and

incapacitated by multiple waves of ecstatic bliss, rushes of pleasurable physical sensations, hours and day-long periods of unceasing prayer, emotions that coursed through my body, weeping and testifying to God's glory, and periods where I couldn't communicate or take care of my physical needs (friends were essential in sustaining me). I wrote voluminously and often incoherently about my gratitude and wonder. I was in a constant state of being blessed by higher levels, but was not myself as an absolute vessel for God's consciousness.

By chance, I heard the name "The Church of Conscious Harmony" and found my community. After reading Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, I recognized that I had been asleep and in personality for most of my life. After a further contemplative retreat, I understood God had gifted me with these mystical experiences so I could become aware and resonant with God's Love, not simply to dwell in their delights. I asked God to take away these gifts so that I could dedicate myself to the actualization of my own transformation and that of others. I began attending the Commentaries classes and became a student of the Work of Inner Christianity.

These spiritual gifts empowered my continuing journey in new and deeper ways. I aim to be present in a three-centered state of active receptivity to God. I wish to make myself a clear channel for higher energy, to be a "lightning rod" for higher consciousness. I can only do this by emptying myself of the habitual, repetitive sleep of personality in my

reactions, imagination and projection.

Spiritual graces are not my main path of transformation. Rather, they are signposts on the spiritual path. We are self-developing organisms, and our development is dependent on the degree we are magnetized toward and have willingness to Work. It is not enough to experience grace, although it offers me the potential to cultivate divine experience in my incarnate being, to participate in the dynamism of becoming. Increasingly, it is easier to regain higher states if my personality is passive, and I am actively receptive to all around me. I must anchor my bodily sensations, remain emotionally constant, and release thought patterns that hinder me from becoming a receptive energetic conduit. This journey cannot lead to evolution – or theosis – unless I put my full measure and more into this quest. So I am going for it! ☉

SERMON SERIES

TO BE FULLY ALIVE

As we prepare our hearts, minds and bodies in the season of Lent, our sermons invite us to verify the words of St. Irenaeus in our lived experience, that truly, "The glory of God is a human being who is fully alive."

Our teachings ready us for Holy Week as we reclaim the primacy of a path of consciously chosen love at the heart of the Christian faith. This moves us toward celebrating the centrality of the Paschal Mystery in our lives, our world and in the cosmos. ☉

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

THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

MAGNETIC CENTER: AN INNER GUIDE BY TAMARA FIELD

In the *Commentaries*, Gurdjieff describes the magnetic center as an inner faculty that pulls a person toward truth and deeper understanding. Most people live mechanically, without questioning much about their existence, but some feel an inner pull – an unshakable sense that there is more to life than what appears on the surface. This pull, the magnetic center, develops over time through meaningful experiences, deep questions, and exposure to certain ideas.

Gurdjieff explains that as the magnetic center strengthens, it attracts a person to the right influences such as books, teachers, or teachings that awaken them from mechanical living. It also serves as a filter, helping to distinguish truth from illusion, guiding a person toward genuine inner work rather than distractions or misleading paths. When I feel drawn toward ideas that challenge the ordinary way of thinking, it is likely my magnetic center guiding me.

Interestingly, this concept aligns with the biblical idea of renewing the mind found in Romans 12:2, which encourages believers to reject conformity to the world and seek transformation through spiritual growth. To develop my magnetic center, I focus on God's Word, seek wisdom through prayer, and surround myself with those who encourage faith and growth. By nurturing this inner pull toward truth, it helps me discern what is good, acceptable, and perfect in God's will, keeping me aligned with my higher purpose rather than the distractions of the world. ☸

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

BECOMING AS A SERVICE OF LOVE BY MICHAEL TURNER

How does “becoming” proceed? This ongoing, dynamic process of transformation implies something new, an emerging quality or presence that was latent before. Across traditions, we generally think of movement from fragmentation toward wholeness, from unconsciousness to awareness, from isolation to interconnectedness.

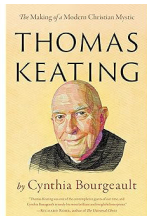
Within the Christian contemplative tradition, we also consider the gift from Centering Prayer to contemplative prayer – and even beyond toward a permanent contemplative state. Just imagine, without the complexity of words, choosing to advocate for a dynamic of becoming through daily simplicity and silence.

While some see an inevitable cosmic “becoming” underway, more agency follows with a belief that human effort can make a difference. Even then, the path(s) toward becoming are like navigating a cosmic forest, where nuances of the path are as varied as the number of travelers themselves.

How refreshing in this metaphorical forest to find a common approach embodied in Centering Prayer, an approach of surrender if you will, of letting go. We make space for the Divine Indwelling to act by slowly rewiring our consciousness. With practice, we come to disregard thoughts and perceptions during the prayer, recognizing them as distractions from Spirit's action within, distractions from the Divine Flow of which we are a part. We experience the results of Spirit's action less (if at all) during the prayer, and more by its effect in daily life. This makes our “becoming” a service of love. ☸

COMMUNITY READING

Thomas Keating: The Making of a Modern Christian Mystic
by Cynthia Bourgeault



This book focuses on the remarkable body of work and writings that Thomas created during the final three decades of his life – offering insight into his final transformation. (A)

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

PRAYER, FASTING, ALMSGIVING

During Lent, how can we strengthen our efforts to confront our programs for happiness? To detach ourselves from them, for purification of the heart, for inner freedom, we must sense a higher order of life.

Prayer: Consider increasing your Centering Prayer periods, attending a Lenten retreat, praying the rosary, and participating in intercessory prayer.

Fasting: Try refraining from certain foods, drinks, media, pleasures, indulgences and observe the inner effects of their abstinence.

Almsgiving: Alms signify what you do out of mercy, be it charitable acts, inner forgiveness, and inner cancelling of debts against others. Maurice Nicoll advises us to not even think about, have inner dialogue about or congratulate ourselves on this noble behavior, lest what we have done “will pass into meritoriousness, even though no one knows about it.” (A)

APRIL CALENDAR

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

†Annual Meeting of Members
Apr 6 11:30am-12:30pm

❖Personal Retreat Day
Apr 9 7am-7pm Register online

❖3-Day Lenten Commuter Retreat
Apr 10-12 Details & registration online

Holy Week Extras

Apr 13 6pm Gurdjieff Music and Readings†

Apr 17 7pm Taizé service†

Apr 18 noon Good Friday worship†

Apr 18-20 Centering Prayer Vigil†
(Sign up for 30-min prayer times for
continuous coverage)

Apr 19 9am-noon Centering Prayer Retreat†
(Register online)

MONTHLY

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

WEEKLY

Mondays

*Commentaries Class 7-8:30pm

Wednesdays

❖Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm

* Online Caregiver Support Group 3pm

❖Bereavement Support Group 4:45-5:45pm
†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

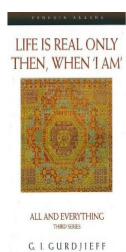
DAILY

†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



CORE FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS

Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am" by G.I. Gurdjieff

Gurdjieff's statement and profound text, “Life is real only then, when ‘I am’,” emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and presence. The book's unfinished nature mirrors the lifelong process of self-development that Gurdjieff advocated. While less structured than his earlier works, these writings offer invaluable insights and provide a timeless blueprint for awakening to the true potential of human consciousness.

Gurdjieff's friendly advice is to read each of his written expositions at least three times: 1) as you normally read, 2) as if you were reading aloud to another person, 3) to fathom the gist of these writings. Only then will you be able to form an impartial judgment, based solely on your own understanding, on these writings. (A)

This is one of the 23 books that CCH recommends as essential reading for growth and transformation on the spiritual journey. Display copies are in the Praxis Center.



THE CHURCH *of*
CONSCIOUS HARMONY
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane Austin TX 78746

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTIN TX
PERMIT # 3386



EASTER

I came so that you may have life.

John 10:10

Easter, with its grace of interior resurrection, is the radical healing of the human condition ... and this struggle between the old and the new self is a constant theme in the New Testament.

The Gospel calls us forth to full responsibility for our emotional life ... to face the unconscious values that underlie our emotional programs for happiness and to change them. The living faith that empowers us to do so is to act under the influence of the Holy Spirit – the same spirit that Jesus breathed upon the apostles on the evening of His resurrection.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*