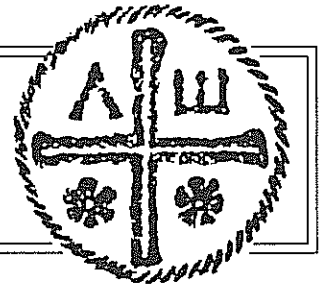


CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH

A Newsletter for Christian Transformation

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The Paradox of Divine Presence

An Advent Meditation

by Father John Healey

Each day in the darkness of my room I sit and await the coming of the Lord even though He is already there. He has been present within me all my life, since my conception, and more so since my Baptism, my Confirmation, my Ordination. Nevertheless each day I await His coming anew. He does come and yet I still go on searching for Him, waiting for Him.

For many centuries the people of Israel awaited the coming of the Promised One. *"In the fullness of time, in the darkness of night, He came. Emmanuel!* God present in our midst! He has been with us now for two millennia since Bethlehem — and yet today a troubled, suffering world still yearns for his presence, still looks for His coming.

This is the paradox of Divine Presence: God is present in His absence! In the loneliness of the exile that weighs upon us all from the day of our expulsion from Paradise we yearn for the God who alone is our joy, our meaning, our fulfillment. He comes to us constantly and just as constantly He eludes our grasp. He is here, He is there, and He is nowhere! He is so near and yet so far away. Nearer to us than we are to ourselves, we are told and we believe. Sometimes I rest peacefully in His presence within me; more often I feel an emptiness in the depths of my being.

He is truly present in the Eucharist, we are told and we believe. Mystery of Faith! Often I experience His strength in the life-giving Bread; then I am helpless in the face of a strong temptation. He is present in the living Word of Scripture, we are told and we believe. Sometimes I recognize His voice. More often the noise of the world drowns Him out. He is in the midst of "two or three gathered in His Name." So He told us and we believe. Sometimes I see His face in every passerby. All too soon I feel no one is my neighbor. Without Him all people become strangers. Why is He so elusive? Will I ever find Him?

The practice of contemplation through Centering Prayer is an exercise in waiting for Someone who is already present. Jesus told us to "try to come in through the narrow door." How can I try when it is He who opens the door from the other side? I can only wait in the darkness for Him to open it. Sometimes the door opens and I "see" Him. He is really present. I see Him with the eyes of faith. Emmanuel! And then He is gone. And I wait...and I wait...

All sorts of reasons occur to me not to persist in my pursuit of God. As I continue on my spiritual journey I am "dying." I am losing so much that was meaningful and precious, and I seem to receive so little in return. Yet I cannot, I must not discontinue my search. The longer I proceed, even though He seems ever further away, the greater my desire to find Him, the keener my hunger for his presence. So I wait day after day, month after month, year

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The End of Our Worlds

by Father Thomas Keating

Advent is the liturgical season that celebrates the theme of divine light. This great light, incarnated in Jesus, confronts any kind of darkness, illusion, ignorance. If you reflect for a moment on the natural cycles of life, our world is always coming to an end. The world of the womb comes to an end at birth; the world of infants comes to an end at about three; childhood comes to an end at adolescence; adolescence at young adulthood; young adulthood at the mid-age crisis; then comes old age, senility and death. Life is a process. The experience of growing up and the decline of physical energy forces us to let go of each period of life as we pass through it. Thus physical life is always giving way to further development. It should be no surprise therefore that Jesus invites us to let the privatized worlds of our emotional attachments, preconceived ideas and pre-packaged values come to an end.

One of the messages of Advent, especially the one about the end of the world, is not so much about "the" end of the world—nor even about physical death which is the end of the world for each of us—as about all the worlds that come to an end in the natural evolution of life. Thus, every time we move to a new level of faith, the previous world that we live in with all its relationships also comes to an end. This is what John the Baptist and later Jesus meant when they began their ministry with the world "Repent." The message they meant to convey was "It's the end of your

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National Contemplative Update

Colorado Update

Centering Prayer continues to flourish in the Denver Archdiocese. Introductory workshops have been offered in the parishes, as well as mini-retreats and intensive weekend retreats. Facilitators have been trained to work with Centering Prayer groups. Coming events include a Facilitator Skills Training Workshop on January 11, given by Sr. Bernadette Teasdale; A "Letting Go" workshop will be offered by Mary Mrozowski from the Contemplative Live-in Community in New York on the week-end of Jan. 21-22. Father Carl Arico of the National Office of Contemplative Outreach will offer a day of retreat on Sunday, February 5. All of the above will be offered at Spirit of Christ. For more information contact Sr. Bernadette at (303) 422-9174.

Texas Update

The International Thomas Merton Society, SW Regional Chapter, will offer an Introduction to Centering Prayer: A New "Old" Way to Pray, on Saturday, January 7 from 9:00 - 3:30 at St. Francis De Sales Church in Houston, Texas. Contact Joe Eisberg at (713) 847-3513

Florida Update

San Pedro Center in Winter Park, Florida is offering a variety of programs to encourage Centering Prayer in the Diocese of Orlando. Sr. Claire Gregg, is conducting an ongoing Facilitators Workshop, and in February Fr. Carl Arico will be conducting an Intensive Centering Prayer workshop for those who have been practicing Centering Prayer. Several Centering Prayer groups meet on an ongoing basis in various places throughout Central Florida. For more information contact Linda Beauregard, (407) 671-6322.

South Florida continues to offer Centering Prayer workshops and ongoing Centering Prayer groups.

For more information contact: Sr. Mary Clair Donnelly (305) 661-8591.

Connecticut Update

An Introductory Centering Prayer Workshop led by Fr. Carl Arico and Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler is being offered in Avon on Saturday, January 21st at Christ Episcopal Church, 9:30 to 4:00. For more information contact Rev. Jon Widing, (203) 673-9630. The workshop will be followed by a Centering Prayer group which will include Fr. Thomas' Spiritual Journey Tapes.

Ongoing groups meet in Stratford, Ct. Contact Fr. Thomas Lynch at (203) 375-5887.

Massachusetts Update

An ongoing Centering Prayer group meets at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. For information on this and other area groups contact Connie Daniel, (413) 253-9451.

Ohio Update

Contemplative Outreach of Ohio recently hosted a luncheon at the Ursuline Motherhouse. Father Basil Pennington was guest speaker at the occasion of the first anniversary of Contemplative Outreach of Ohio. Contact person: Bill Singilis, (216) 731-6651.

Washington Update

Contemplative Outreach Northwest is an active contemplative community which practices and teaches contemplative prayer. Contact person: Paul Peterhans, Seattle, (206) 329-6182

New York Update

A seven week course will be offered at St. Francis of Assisi, 129 West 31st St., beginning Wednesday, February 1 and running through March 15. The Cost for the entire course will be \$40.

An Intensive Day of Prayer will be held at St. Jean Baptiste January 15 from 9:30 to 4:00. The cost is \$15. Contact person: Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler (201) 838-3384.

New Jersey Update

Mt. St. Mary's House of Prayer in Watchung offers weekly contemplative prayer/support groups for deepening the Centering Prayer practice. Contact person: Sister Mary Jo or Sr. Eileen (201) 753-2091.

Contact person for other ongoing groups in New Jersey: Fr. Carl Arico (201) 436-2222

Spiritual Formation at Chrysalis House

Chrysalis House is a center established by Father Thomas Keating for contemplative living. The house offers formation in Centering Prayer and the contemplative life through participating in a functioning contemplative community with emphasis on developing each person's interior and active visible life in Christ. The formation offered is a practical one, rooted in prayer, community life and work.

Residents at Chrysalis House make a commitment for at least one month to immerse themselves in the process of contemplative formation.

Retreats

Other ways of participating in spiritual formation at Chrysalis House:

- Centering Prayer Introductory Workshops
- Intensive Centering Prayer Weekends
- Centering Prayer Renewal Weekends
- Individual Days of Prayer

For further information write: Chrysalis House, 21 Ball Rd., Warwick, New York 10990

Long Island Hosts Father Thomas



Father Keating with L.I. Coordinators Anne Mazza, Marie Lopez and Joan Kovacs.

Contemplative Outreach of Long Island continues to grow and expand its programs. The program has received tremendous support from the Bishop of Rockville Centre, the Most Reverend J.R. McGann. In a letter to the diocese he said: *Under the leadership of Father Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach seeks to bring the riches of the contemplative tradition to the spiritual development of lay persons as well as priests and religious, through the teaching and practice of centering prayer. For several years there has been a growing number of contemplative prayer groups on Long Island consisting mainly of lay people. They comprise the Long Island Chapter of Contemplative Outreach. I am happy to recommend them to you. They will serve as a resource for the Diocese and can be contacted through the Office of Pastoral Formative. They are available to give workshops and times of recollection on Centering Prayer and the contemplative tradition.*

Upcoming events on Long Island include ongoing and Introductory Centering Prayer Groups. In addition the "Spiritual Journey" tape program is being presented for a second time at several locations. Monthly days of intensive prayer

are held at the Holy Family House of Prayer in Rockville Center on the third Sunday of each month.

For more information on these and other events contact Anne Mazza (516) 599-0957, Joan Kovacs (718) 631-3729 or write Contemplative Outreach of Long Island, P.O. Box 594, Gardiners Avenue, Levittown, New York 11756.

INTENSIVE RETREATS

Ten day Intensive Centering Prayer Retreats are offered at St. Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado, by Fr. Thomas Keating and staff of Contemplative Outreach. Contact: Pat Johnson, Registrar, 689 Colorado Ave., Carbondale, CO 81623. Phone: (303)-963-3964

Available Resources

The Spiritual Journey video and audiotapes by Father Thomas are available for sale or rent. For further information contact: Walter Lawson, 7 Mesa Lane, Colorado Springs, CO 80906. (719) 632-7320 or Contemplative Outreach Media, P.O. Box 29, Snowmass, Colorado 81654. (303) 927-3656.

Annual Meeting at Chrysalis House

Marking the fourth anniversary of the founding of Contemplative Outreach by Fr. Thomas Keating, the Executive Director along with members of the Advisory Board and the Board of Directors met with Father Thomas on Monday, October 10th at Chrysalis House, Warwick, NY. This was the first annual meeting of both Boards.

The main topics of discussion were finances, the direct mail appeal, the presentation of the first draft of the Presenter's Manual for Introductory Workshops and Follow-up, the reorganization of the Newsletter, the need for outreach to the Hispanic community, and the possibility of opening communication with the T.V. ministry within the U.S.A. There was also news of the work of Fr. Basil Pennington at Medjugorje. Also, Ivan, one of the visionaries, has revealed that the Blessed Mother is interested in having the Centering Prayer practice taught to his advisor, Father Slavko.

The atmosphere of the meeting was reflective, and open to new possibilities which lead to a recommitment on the part of all to the challenges that are present in light of the growth of the movement.

Contemplative Outreach National Office

Networking, resources, and workshop facilitators are available, Contact: Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, Executive Director, National Office, P. O. Box 737, Butler, New Jersey 07405. (201) 838-3384.

Letters, articles or announcements for **Contemplative Outreach Newsletter** should be sent to Connie Daniel, Editor, Contemplative Outreach Newsletter, P.O. Box 1186, Amherst, Ma. 01004.

The End of Our Worlds

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world!" Naturally, we do not like to hear such news. We say, "You're crazy; get rid of this guy; we don't like change. Go away."

The process of conversion begins with genuine openness to change—to be open to the possibility that just as natural life evolves, so our spiritual life is evolving. Our psychological world is the result of natural growth, events over which we had no control in early childhood, and grade school. Grace, which is the presence and action of Christ in our lives, invites us to be ready to let go of where we are now and to be open to the new values that are born when we penetrate to a new understanding of the Gospel and how it applies concretely to our daily lives. Moreover, Jesus calls us to repent not just once; it is a message that keeps recurring. The grace of Christ relentlessly calls us beyond our limitations and fears into new worlds. Like Abraham, the classical paradigm of faith, Jesus asks us to leave land, family, culture, peer group, religious education, everything that we might cling to in order to have an identity or to avoid feeling lonely. All of this Christ gently but firmly calls us to leave saying, "Go forth from your father's house and country and come into the land that I will show you." The call to contemplative prayer is a call into the unknown. It is not a call to nowhere, but it is nowhere that we can imagine. Hence, our resistance.

It is a gilt-edged invitation. Each time you consent to an enhancement of faith, your world changes and all your relationships have to be adjusted to the new perspective and the new light that has been given you. Our relationship to ourselves, to Jesus Christ, to our neighbor, to the Church — to God — all change. It is the end of the world we have previously known and lived in. Sometimes the Spirit

of God deliberately shatters one of these worlds. If we have depended upon them to go to God, it may feel as if we have lost God. We may have doubts about God's very existence. Such doubts may be the best thing that ever happened to us. It is not the true God of faith we have doubts about, but only the God of our limited concepts or dependencies; this god never existed anyway.

And so the second part of Jesus' message is very important. If you repent and are willing to change, or willing to let God change you, the kingdom of God is close; in fact, you have it; it is within you and you can begin to enjoy it. The kingdom of God belongs to those who are poor in spirit, who have let go of their possessive attitude toward everything including God.

Paradox

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after year.

There was a time in my life, a long time, when I turned my face from Him. He pursued me "down the nights and down the days, down the arches of the years," a veritable Hound of Heaven. And I eluded His grasp, eluded His love. Now it is I who pursue Him and He seems to elude me. Or is the pain of His absence really "the shade of His hand outstretched caressingly?"

It is Advent. I believe and I look forward to celebrate His Nativity. My precious faith will sustain me and assure me that He has come. *Emmanuel! God with us.* Even so, on Christmas morning, and all the other mornings, I will continue to sit in the darkness of my room! waiting for Him to come. And I will wait. I will wait. He is faithful.

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

Appeal for Funds

A direct mail appeal is underway in order to sustain the work of Contemplative Outreach. The increasing demand for workshops, intensive retreats, the live-in communities, leadership and teacher training, the development and production of resource materials for workshops and ongoing groups, newsletter costs, and the need to create a more cohesive and structured National Office makes such an appeal crucial. In order to further the prayer of interior silence, and to develop a well-defined program to introduce to local parishes, Contemplative Outreach is hoping to raise \$125,000 to cover anticipated costs in 1989.

**Contemplative Outreach
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