



God is Already Here

Thomas Keating



We used to think that time and space were limited. But now we know the galaxies are going beyond space as we know it and are going away so fast that in another generation, we are told, their light will no longer be seen by planet earth. They are traveling faster than light, and will soon get so far away that their light can never again get back to us.

So take a good look at the sky. It's our last chance to see the oldest galaxies. Where are they going? We don't know. The realization that we know very little about the universe grows as we experience the presence of God everywhere. When we see God everywhere, we don't care about knowledge. That divine presence enables us to forget ourselves and enter into collaboration with the creation of the universe. Apparently we have been given an enormous capacity to affect it. We are accountable for everyone else in the human family and for all living things. For all practical purposes, how we treat other people is what we are doing to ourselves.

God is already here. Hence, to search for God at a certain point in our spiritual evolution is a mistake. It is no longer the proper time for that kind of effort. The most productive effort is to accept the endless humiliations of the false self. The spiritual journey is

not a career, but a succession of "diminutions of self," as Teilhard de Chardin put it. This has nothing to do with the neurosis of a low self-image. It is simply the fact that we are completely dependent on the love of God. We are always in the arms of the beloved, whatever we may feel or think.

A new asceticism for people of good will might be the practice of goodness; that is, just being good to everybody. It presupposes the immense evolutionary process from matter in its most primitive form to the transformation of developing human intelligence and freedom into the divine life itself. God, out of his infinite mercy, made himself equal to us in the Incarnation by identifying with the human condition. God makes us equal to him by transforming us into his own unconditional love.

What maintains our growth on the spiritual journey are not ideas but insight. Such are the inspirations of the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit. In prayer, not thinking but being is the primary practice. Thinking about ourselves or the ups and downs of the present moment is not it.

Doing out of the sense of being lived in by God is getting close. ☸





Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler

Contemplative Lessons from My Dog

My motivation for getting a puppy back in 2009 was to have a companion to walk and share outdoor time with. I was told by my doctor that I had to walk for at least 20 minutes a day to strengthen my bones, so I set off with good intentions. Gradually my time for walking was distracted by others tasks, by imperfect weather, etc. The excuses flowed.

The thought came to me that if I had a dog I would have to go out, no excuses. It wasn't long after I made the decision to get a puppy when my brother unknowingly sent me the sweetest photo of a tiny little female pup. I must say it was love at first sight and there was nothing but an enthusiastic Yes! I traveled to Houston to pick her up and we began our journey into the heart of love immediately.

I remember the first night very well. I put her in a crate in the adjacent bathroom, said goodnight to her and turned off the light. About 20 minutes later I heard a little whimpering, which I ignored. Eventually it got louder and I had to go and see her. After all it was the very first night she was not with her mother and siblings. I opened the door, picked her up, comforted her for about 10 minutes, put her back in the crate and off I went to bed again. Another 20 minutes past and she started whimpering again. Back I went and re-played the same routine. I decided it was a good time for her to learn Centering Prayer and settle down. I put her in my lap and placed my hands on either side of her tiny body and began by saying my opening prayer aloud. She stayed still and just laid there on her back. I began Centering Prayer and within several minutes she was out and very still. We remained there for about an hour. She never moved.

The next morning, I awoke to find her still on her back in the comfort of my lap. I took her out immediately and she followed me all over the back yard and then back into the kitchen. My brother joined me there and watched us walk around. He noticed that this little puppy had changed. He asked what I did to make her calm down. I told him what happened during the night and he replied, "You have made her a contemplative in a just a few hours."

This little story illustrates how simple and easy Centering Prayer is when we are willing to just remain still in the lap of a loving presence. A relationship of trust develops quickly without any self-reflection. Bonding happens in the silence.

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much about myself and how
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Over the years, our relationship has deepened. We still practice Centering Prayer together day after day. She responds to the gong and she usually doesn't move. She is my constant companion — always alongside me with adoring eyes and a ready "smile" when she sees me enter a room. This little dog has taught me much about myself and how I handle the events of daily life. She knows God's first language — silence. Just watching her closely can take me out of my thoughts and bring me into the present moment, which is where she lives all the time. She is the perfect example of the surrendered life. As Eckhart Tolle points out, she has no self-image, good or bad, no need to play roles, nor does she love herself or hate herself. She has no self. I think of her as my teacher in the ways of God — always loving, always forgiving, and always available to accompany me.

It is no wonder that dog spelled backwards is GOD.

I am reminded of our theological principle #12: "Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience a deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation."

Centering Prayer deepens relationships with oneself, with God and with other creatures and creation. Interdependence describes my relationship with my little dog. It is one of mutual love and we each serve one another. I take care of her and she takes care of me — differently based on our capacity and abilities. Each in our own way we are giving and receiving love all day from one another. This is how I experience God — giving and receiving love all day every day. I believe that giving and receiving love is what creatures and creation is all about. I recently read this, "Remember to greet all the flowers you pass today/ floral, animal and human/ they have much to share with you." How true this has been for me over the years. ☸



Fr. Carl J. Arico

Womb of the Earth

Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience a deepening commitment to the needs and the rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation.

Contemplative Outreach Theological Principle #12



In Pope Francis' recent visit to Cuba and the United States, he called upon us to look at the larger picture, to have "an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation." This is highlighted in his recent encyclical *Laudato Si* – On the Care of our Common Home.

How does the continuing practice of Centering Prayer deepen the respect for creation and the needs of others? Over time, the Spirit awakens us beyond ourselves — to people and the Earth around us. We are given new eyes, an open mind and an open heart to see things more clearly, to see the reality of the world around us. Our place within it is relativized. We realize we are not the center of the universe.

"Praise be to you, my Lord." These were the words of St. Francis of Assisi in his wonderful song to creation. He reminds us that the earth is our common home: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us ..."

How awe-filled St. Francis viewed all of creation and all God's people. Imagine how deeply he felt that he could call them his brothers and his sisters; they were part of his family. Have you not found yourself so overcome with the beauty of creation that you broke into song? When I walk the shoreline of Long Beach Island, I make up songs to Gregorian chant as I stroll along. I hear the applause of the waves lapping against the shore and the rocks. (Of course I look up and down to make sure no one is in sight!) There is no separation – I am one with all of nature. We are all particles of the same earth energy, of the cosmos and of God.

“We distinguish between ‘creation’ which includes all that God has made as an act of love, and ‘nature’ which is the system of natural life that can be studied and understood scientifically. ‘Creation is of the order of Love.’ It flows from God’s own heart and not from chaos. Thus every single element of creation is loved by God. We meet God in creation.” (cf #76, 77 of *Laudato Si*)

In Christian and philosophical traditions, two sacred books are recognized: The Bible and the Book of Nature. In light of the insight above, perhaps it would better to speak of the latter as the Book of Creation.

As a man of faith St Francis saw creation as a window through which he also saw God. We must take our place within creation, not stand outside as a spectator. Like cells in the human body, all cells are important in the body of creation. One cell cannot say, “I have no need for you.” The Catholic Catechism teaches that each created animal and plant reflects the face of God. Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws.” (Catechism 339)

“The spirituality of the Earth refers to a quality of the Earth itself, not a human spirituality with special reference to the planet Earth. Earth is the material principle out of which we are born and from which we derive all that we are and all that we have. We come into being in and through the Earth, simply put, we are Earthlings. The Earth is our origin, our nourishment, our educator, our healer, our fulfillment. At its core, even our spirituality is Earth derived. ...

“For too long this spiritual quality of the creation story has been missing. The spirit dimension of the universe and of the planet Earth needs to be established if we are to have a functional spirituality.

“How different might it be if our religious traditions understood the spiritual significance of

experiencing the galactic emergence of the universe, the shaping of the Earth, the appearance of life and of human consciousness, and the historical sequence in human development?” (*The Sacred Universe*, Chapter 5, “The Spirituality of the Earth,” Thomas Berry)

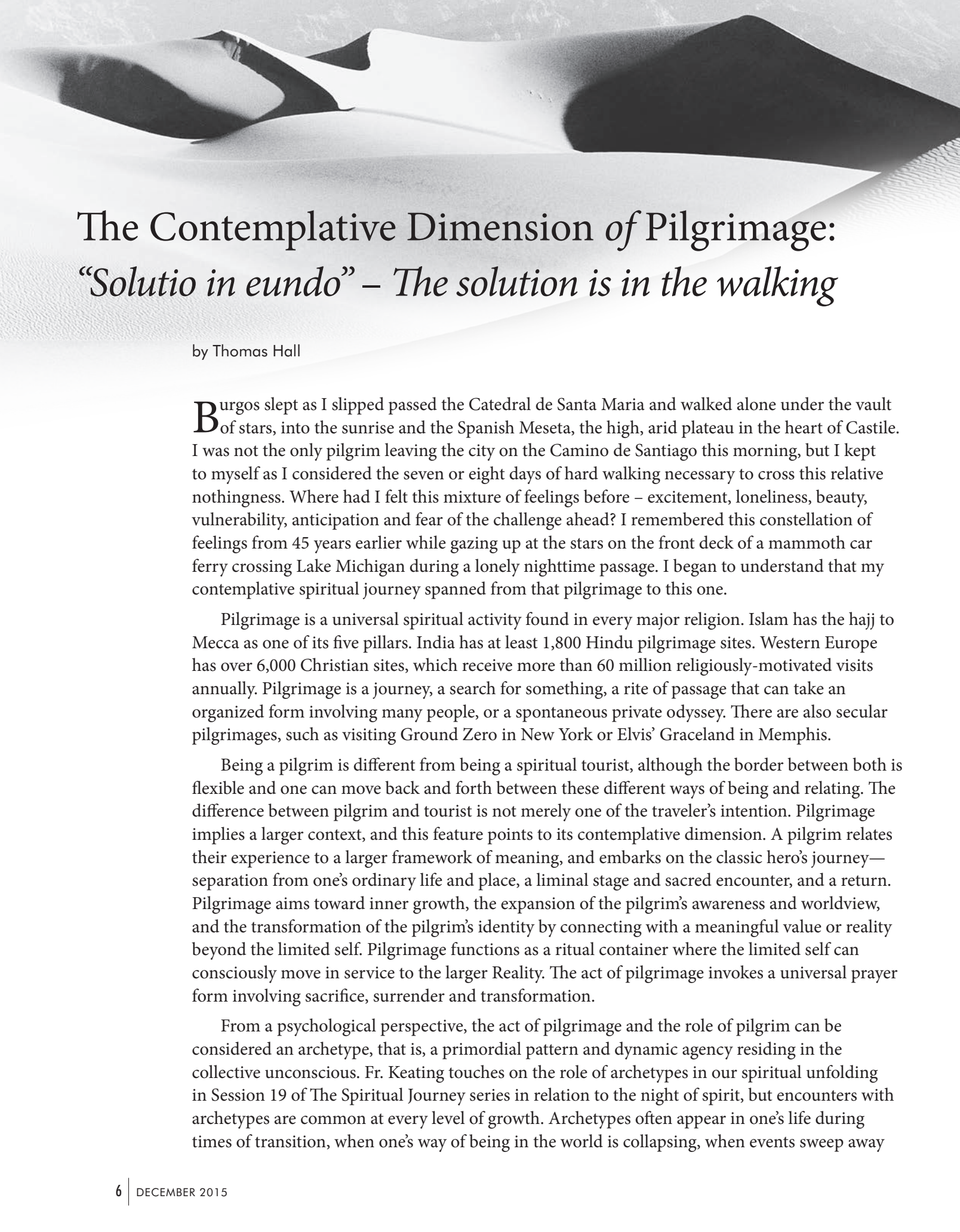
This is our lineage, our ancestral roots — all part of God’s larger plan. The cosmos’ are our great grandparents – we are minerals of their minerals, dust of their dust, fire of their fire, water of their water. We are reminded of this during the Ash Wednesday ritual, when ashes are placed on us and the minister says, “Remember man you are dust and unto dust you shall return.”

There is a oneness with all creation. Have you not felt it whether you are sitting in your garden, walking through the woods, standing on the top of a mountain, boating on the river, watching the changing of the seasons, playing with your pet — and on and on into the cosmos. We are not standing outside of life; we are within it. The whole of creation sings of God’s love. Reflect on psalms like 148:3-5, or on Daniel 3:56-88 or the Canticle of St. Francis.

All things in creation are interrelated, and we grasp their meaning only through those relationships. No creature is self-sufficient, including us.

So as we consent to God’s presence and action in Centering Prayer, we cannot underestimate the vastness of this consent as we live our lives in the womb of the Earth and beyond. ☸

Inspired by: *Laudato Si – On Care For Our Common Home*, Pope Francis; *Laudato Si – Group Reading Guide*, Bill Huebsch, 23rd Publications; *The Sacred Universe*, Thomas Berry, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker, Columbia University Press NY. See also these Scripture passages: Col 1: 15-20, Eph 1: 3-10, Romans 8:19-22.



The Contemplative Dimension of Pilgrimage: *“Solutio in eundo” – The solution is in the walking*

by Thomas Hall

Burgos slept as I slipped passed the Catedral de Santa Maria and walked alone under the vault of stars, into the sunrise and the Spanish Meseta, the high, arid plateau in the heart of Castile. I was not the only pilgrim leaving the city on the Camino de Santiago this morning, but I kept to myself as I considered the seven or eight days of hard walking necessary to cross this relative nothingness. Where had I felt this mixture of feelings before – excitement, loneliness, beauty, vulnerability, anticipation and fear of the challenge ahead? I remembered this constellation of feelings from 45 years earlier while gazing up at the stars on the front deck of a mammoth car ferry crossing Lake Michigan during a lonely nighttime passage. I began to understand that my contemplative spiritual journey spanned from that pilgrimage to this one.

Pilgrimage is a universal spiritual activity found in every major religion. Islam has the hajj to Mecca as one of its five pillars. India has at least 1,800 Hindu pilgrimage sites. Western Europe has over 6,000 Christian sites, which receive more than 60 million religiously-motivated visits annually. Pilgrimage is a journey, a search for something, a rite of passage that can take an organized form involving many people, or a spontaneous private odyssey. There are also secular pilgrimages, such as visiting Ground Zero in New York or Elvis’ Graceland in Memphis.

Being a pilgrim is different from being a spiritual tourist, although the border between both is flexible and one can move back and forth between these different ways of being and relating. The difference between pilgrim and tourist is not merely one of the traveler’s intention. Pilgrimage implies a larger context, and this feature points to its contemplative dimension. A pilgrim relates their experience to a larger framework of meaning, and embarks on the classic hero’s journey—separation from one’s ordinary life and place, a liminal stage and sacred encounter, and a return. Pilgrimage aims toward inner growth, the expansion of the pilgrim’s awareness and worldview, and the transformation of the pilgrim’s identity by connecting with a meaningful value or reality beyond the limited self. Pilgrimage functions as a ritual container where the limited self can consciously move in service to the larger Reality. The act of pilgrimage invokes a universal prayer form involving sacrifice, surrender and transformation.

From a psychological perspective, the act of pilgrimage and the role of pilgrim can be considered an archetype, that is, a primordial pattern and dynamic agency residing in the collective unconscious. Fr. Keating touches on the role of archetypes in our spiritual unfolding in Session 19 of The Spiritual Journey series in relation to the night of spirit, but encounters with archetypes are common at every level of growth. Archetypes often appear in one’s life during times of transition, when one’s way of being in the world is collapsing, when events sweep away

the old understandings which offered security and control in the face of life's great problems. When an archetype is activated, it tends to direct the individual psyche to line up with its lines of force, like iron filings ordered by a magnetic field. Gripped by an archetype, one feels in contact with some overwhelming power or compulsion, fascinating, life changing, numinous. But how best to work with this energy at our edges? How are we to respond to this invitation from the mystery beyond? Consciously or unconsciously, we define our reality in terms of these symbols and then act on the basis of these energies. When we consciously relate to an archetype in a meaningful way it can transform our consciousness.

I gradually came to understand that my compelling desire to walk the Camino was an encounter with archetypal energy. I first heard about the ancient Christian pilgrimage route, the Camino de Santiago, from a member of my Centering Prayer group in 1994 who had just returned from walking "The Way." However, I was a new father of four children aged four and under, and just entering the legal profession. Though I dismissed the impulse, the hook was mysteriously set. In May 2008 my oldest sons were graduating from high school, and my wife was diagnosed with cancer. Inexplicably, the desire to walk the Camino resurged, but again the timing was not right. Finally in 2014, my wife and I were empty-nesters, and I was considering whether to continue my legal career. All of these were times of transition where I encountered this activated archetype. I was also approaching my 60th birthday. I was the same age as my father when he received his fatal cancer diagnosis. He died when I was 15, and I left home less than two months later on my first pilgrimage – hitchhiking 1,200 miles from northern Wisconsin to New York City, crossing Lake Michigan on that midnight ferry. I was not running away from home, but blindly trying to connect with some larger reality that would help me cope with overwhelming grief.

On my first pilgrimage I was ignorant about the archetypal energy fueling my hitchhiking journey and the potential for transformation, and in my selfishness I caused those I loved great pain. While planning and walking the 500 miles from St. Jean

Pied de Port, France to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, I determined to consciously encounter whatever was being birthed, and channel the arising energy in the traditional ways recommended by the contemplative tradition: service to others, ritual, and practice to foster reverence and dependence on God.

I was aware of my own self-serving motivations for making this pilgrimage, and determined to expand the focus of the pilgrimage beyond myself. So I created the 2014 Camino Walkathon to raise money for each mile I walked to benefit three charities: Food For the Poor, The Southern Poverty Law Center, and Women for Women International. We raised enough money to dig a water well in Haiti, help distribute Teaching Tolerance educational material free to tens of thousands of U.S. schools, and pay for 16 women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to attend a one-year job training program as a way to bring lasting change to this conflict zone.

Ritual is an important tool for channeling emotionally charged material in the direction of transformation. At the highest point of the Camino, the Pass of Irago, stands the Cruz de Ferro — a large iron cross on a wooden pole. Legend says that when the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was being built, pilgrims were asked to contribute by bringing a stone. The tradition is to set a stone at the Cruz de Ferro, brought from the pilgrim's place of origin, symbolizing what the pilgrim leaves behind to prepare for rebirth on the last stage of the Camino. So for centuries pilgrims have left their stones, or other tokens of blessings or burdens. I carried a small stone in my pack — a brown piece of sandstone from the southern shore of Lake Superior where I grew up. I used the stone as a way to focus on those habits, self-definitions and understandings that I wished to surrender, to honor the transition I was making from middle age, and to express my gratitude. Before I left for Spain I circulated a picture of this sandstone to family, friends, co-workers, donors and supporters. Many people joined me in adding their prayers and intentions to this token. I carried it for all of us, and laid it down at Cruz de Ferro on our behalf.

On the Camino, especially during that long walk across the Meseta, there was plenty of time each day to practice walking meditation. On long Centering Prayer retreats everyone is instructed in the practice of walking meditation between periods of Centering Prayer. Over the years I developed a more articulated version of walking meditation, based largely on guidance from Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.

There are many similarities between walking meditation and Centering Prayer. It is best to begin both by affirming our intention to pray — to be in relationship — during the practice. Just as in Centering Prayer, the secret of walking meditation is to learn to let go, to walk without wanting to get somewhere. To walk with presence so that our footprints bear only the marks of peace and joy, we must let go of conflict, sadness and worries — like shaking off raindrops clinging to a coat. On the Camino, I used prayer phrases to count the number of steps in relation to my breath. My pace was usually four steps breathing in and four out, and I often used the scriptural phrase, “Into thy hands, I commend my spirit” synchronized with my striding. The click-click-click-click of my walking poles often held my rhythm. The instruction for handling distractions during walking meditation is familiar. If you become aware that the mind is engaged in some interesting sight or thought along the way, simply return to the practice. After learning to coordinate the elements of walking meditation, the practice creates a marvelous balance of simple open awareness and equanimity. This quality of stillness is similar to my experience of deep peace in Centering Prayer, except that my eyes are open and the body is fully engaged. Walking meditation energizes the unconscious and produces a similar dynamic of purification as Centering Prayer. And Grace attracts outer experiences onto which the false self can be projected so it may be dismantled. Walking meditation creates the necessary state of mind to see that every path, no matter how fearful, is welcomed as our path so that we do not hesitate to proceed. The soul is fed where action and contemplation meet, where the inner and outer co-operate as one, where words become embodied, where God’s presence becomes our heartbeat and the rhythm of life itself.

All growth requires movement away from the place we have known. Although it is not necessary to go on pilgrimage to make the inner journey, Thomas Merton suggests both. “The geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey. The inner journey is the interpolation of the meanings and signs of the outer pilgrimage. One can have one without the other. It is best to have both.” Thomas Merton, *Mystics & Zen Masters* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), p. 92. ☸

Thomas Hall is a long-time Centering Prayer practitioner. Together with his wife, Colleen, they founded Nebraska Contemplative Outreach in 1990. For 17 years Thomas taught a summer course at Creighton University in the Christian Spirituality Program on “Centering Prayer and the Experience of God.” He currently resides in Wimberley, Texas.

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Transformed Trauma

This article is the result of Pamela Begeman reaching out on the CO Facebook group to learn if anyone is treating veterans with PTSD through Centering Prayer. I am not a veteran, but I have PTSD and am experiencing amazing healing through the practice of Centering Prayer and all that goes with it. At her invitation I share with you here not the trauma I experienced but the tools that opened me up to the healing power of God's infinite love — grace. What I hope is that my experience will help those in the process of healing and encourage those who are afraid to heal.

The following are tools I learned that have been beneficial in healing my trauma, in conjunction with a regular Centering Prayer practice, attendance at weekly Centering Prayer meetings and yearly intensive retreats. Throughout this healing process I have been serving in ministry. Along the way I have met Christ in so many people and been offered healing love in so many ways that I believe with all my heart that God heals us in his loving community.

It was when I started the emotional unloading in Centering Prayer that I discovered I have PTSD. My mentor set me up with a spiritual director who insisted that I get immediate mental health counseling. I am seven years into this process with my spiritual director and mental health counselor. They have never met but work in unison to guide me on the right path.

What my mental health counselor does for me is ask the hard questions and educate me as to how our brain and emotions work. Always assuring me that she believes my story, she asks the tough question, "How do you know that?" Then she proceeds to open me to the other possibilities to loosen the emotional grip of the trauma.

The most important thing she helped me with is to find a "safe" place. It took me forever to find and design it but once I did, it was bullet train transformation. My safe place that lives in my imagination is the towering hickory grove on the farm where I grew up. Golden sunshine filters down through the trees; the earth is laden with moss covered stone. A rocky brook babbles through the grove lined with forget-me-nots and occasional clumps of browned-eye susans. The air is filled with the songs of cardinals and the coo of the doves. Bees and butterflies and dragonflies are busy doing the work of nature. I am surrounded by all the love I have known in this life. Jesus is present here to love me with glowing protective warmth that defies description. Belleruth Naparstek's guided imagery meditations perfected this step.

My spiritual director Maru L de Guevara taught me to limit my time of prayer when I was in the midst of my emotional unloading (relived trauma) and the 4R's: To notice if you are: 1- **Resisting** the situation you find yourself in. 2- **Retaining** /holding on to what is happening or coming up emotionally

(e.g., fear, resentment, anger etc.). 3-**Reacting** rather than choosing your response and finally 4- **Returning** to your intention to be open to the presence and action of God within you and around you in whatever circumstance you find yourself in. I found that I had to repeat these over and over to be prepared for when I was triggered, just like an athlete developing muscle memory. Then I did the same with the Welcoming Prayer: all my needs for security, affection, and control are met, and I let go of my desire to change my situation, practicing it over and over until it became a part of who I am. She also reminded me over and over and over again that God is working a mighty work. I hear her voice saying this to me every time I get triggered. Thanks be to God, because it is true.

On my first eight day intensive retreat I learned the active prayer. I also learned I had a crisis of trust. The retreat was spent walking the grounds saying my active prayer “God’s love is everlasting,” breaking the cycle of negative thoughts that controlled my emotions. Every eight day intensive retreat I have been on has provided great revelation and amazing healing all at the same time.

Maru advised me to guard my heart. In Fr. Thomas Keating’s book *Open Mind, Open Heart*, “Appendix 1 - Practices That Help to Translate the Effects of Centering Prayer into Daily Life,” the sixth practice listed is “keep guard of the heart. ... This practice releases upsetting emotions into the present moment.” One of his suggestions for this practice is that we give our emotions to God as a gift. In my imagination I have beautifully gift-wrapped packages ready so that when I am triggered I can pour all my emotional reaction into a box and give it as a gift to Jesus. I have learned over time that my first emotional reaction to being triggered is distorted and energized. Once the energy of it is released — given as a gift — I rest and wait for Jesus to respond. Reality starts to set in allowing me to grieve and let go and forgive and heal.

She also encouraged a practice of Lectio Divina. I practiced this daily for three years before it lit me on fire. My most important go-to Scripture is 2 Corinthians 12: “My grace is sufficient for you and when I am weak then I am strong.” Meditation on Scripture in the midst of recovery from being triggered brings into my awareness the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the intimacy of God’s kind and merciful love. The David and Goliath story (1 Samuel 17) brings me strength when fear is trying to overtake me. I keep five smooth stones close at hand to grip as I remember that like David, God is working a mighty work and this giant (my PTSD) is going down.

And I could not finish without expressing my profound gratitude to Fr. Keating. I read *Open Mind, Open Heart* and *Invitation to Love* over and over as well as watching The Spiritual Journey series. What the Holy Spirit reveals and heals are all affirmed in the books and videos. The understanding of what I am experiencing and the revelation of possibilities fuel my transformative journey.

You know when you are healed from your painful memories when you are grateful for them. For me this became possible when God held me and asked me to watch my abusers abusing me knowing that he loved them unconditionally. At first I felt betrayed but God held me there in his infinite wisdom leading me to the greatest joy - acceptance of all of life and freedom from emotional tyranny. My memories will always be painful, but God’s love penetrates all. I am grateful for my PTSD because in healing I can see how intimate God’s love has always been in every situation. My life has been transformed from despair to always and everywhere hopeful.

I have asked that my name not be included as part of this article to protect my family. They are at different stages of “accepting the truth” and I would never want to trigger them. It is hard work building bridges in dysfunctional relationships and I find that they are fragile. But one family member that I have to give great credit to is my loving husband for his endless, boundless support and courage to make this journey with me. ☸

Please send your comments, suggestions and content submissions to Pamela Begeman at clp@coutreach.org.

Contemplative Activism: Doing Good Better

by Phileena Heuertz



An accidental (and literal) marriage of a contemplative and an activist marks my husband, Chris, and my life together. Social justice service has been an incubator for our vocational imaginations and partnership in marriage.

For 20 years, Chris and I co-directed an international mission among the most vulnerable of the world's poor. We served among children with HIV and AIDS, abandoned children living on the streets, women and girls enslaved in the commercial sex industry, and former child soldiers. Our humble organization grew to 300 young people serving in 13 cities across the globe.

After so many years leading this international movement of love and hope, my husband and I noticed a few things about social justice types:

- 1) We are often some of the grumpiest people—carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders.
- 2) We tend to take better care of others than we care for ourselves.
- 3) Many of us perpetually teeter on the edge of burnout.

It didn't take long for us to realize we were going to need a deep spirituality to not just survive such intense service, but to find a way to thrive in it.

Though Chris and I grew up in the Evangelical tradition, we were mentored as young adults by renowned Catholic spiritual teachers like Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier and Richard Rohr. And then one grace-filled day, we met Fr. Thomas Keating and he introduced us to the Christian contemplative tradition and Centering Prayer. Our lives have never been the same.

The practice of Centering Prayer coupled with wise teaching from various mentors helped us to begin to recognize unconscious motivations that not only interfered with our service, but in some cases, infected it. We had awakened to the contemplative journey and there was no turning back. So in

2012, we founded Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism, in Omaha, Nebraska, to attempt to help people “do good better” by grounding their social engagement in contemplative spirituality. I dare say the invitation to integrate contemplation and action has never been more widely received.

Today, in addition to teaching and giving contemplative retreats around the world, we host two contemplative retreats a year in the Omaha area at the Benedictine Monastery and Retreat Center in Schuyler. People fly in from all over the country and in some instances from other countries. In the first three years of Gravity’s inception, we have hosted over 200 retreatants from 15 countries. More than one-fifth do not ascribe to any Christian tradition (Agnostics, Atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, and Non-Religious participants) and the median age is 33. 72% are under the age of 40 and 30% are non-white.

When we started Gravity, we wondered, “Would *young* people be interested?” Most contemplative groups we knew about were comprised of older, more seasoned, mature people. However, we have been astounded at the way in which young people have responded to Gravity. It seems that the committed prayer of contemplatives who have gone before us is having an impact. People of all ages are awakening to their need to be connected to God through grounding practices like Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, and the Welcoming Prayer. Generally, most young people who attend our retreats know little to nothing about Christian contemplative prayer practices. But once introduced, they nearly always respond with relief and gratitude to find a practice that helps them cultivate presence to themselves and to God.

Our over-developed society may be contributing to the receptive response of young people.

Contemplative prayer—practices marked by solitude, silence, and stillness— offers correction to the imbalance and depletion many of us are experiencing in our crowded, overly-consumed, hyper-active, digitally-addicted society.

In **solitude**, we learn to be present. We learn to be present to our self, to God and to one another. As we let God heal our hidden fears, we experience more authentic connection to our self, to God and to others. Practicing **silence** helps us develop the ability to listen and discern God’s voice and leading. And over time, as we practice **stillness**, we gain freedom from the misguided egoic motivations of our human condition, and are led to make greater impact for good in our family, community and society.

Young people are certainly taxed with the relentless, fast-paced, jam-packed nature of our times. Contemplative prayer offers an alternative for which their soul longs: presence instead of being scattered, attention instead of preoccupation, clarity or discernment instead of confusion. Clearly, there is hope when younger generations of people combine their ambitious dreams for better world energy with contemplative practices that open them to their divine potential. ☸

Phileena Heuertz is the author of *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life*. She is the founding partner of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism. After 20 years of grassroots social justice work, she and her husband, Chris, now work with all kinds of people who care about their spirituality and want to make the world a better place, by offering contemplative retreats, spiritual direction and pilgrimage. Connect with Phileena at phileena.com, their work at gravitycenter.com and on Twitter @phileena.



The Governing Board from left to right: Fr. Gilberto Walker, Fr. Carl Arico, Mary Dwyer, Nick Cole, Lois Snowden, Ronald Barnett, Mark Nowak.

Dear Friends,

A consistent intention of Contemplative Outreach is to be an authentic, living expression of the Christian contemplative values we hold. We want to serve the needs of our worldwide evolving community by being open and ready to follow the Spirit's movement.

After prayer, study, and consultation, some changes were made to positions and processes. The Circle of Service, which was a representative based model, was transitioned into the Governing Board of CO which is an all-volunteer group. All Board Members serve on behalf of all the individuals and all the groups that make up the Contemplative Outreach community. The Board is now separate from Management but collaborates closely with it through Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, whose title is now Executive Director.

There are benefits and limitations in any structure but this organizational system was selected at this time for its simplicity and clarity of roles. The Governing Board name was chosen to plainly identify what it does. It has three areas of responsibility: setting the overall direction and overarching intentions for CO; financial accountability which includes approving the budget; and hiring/managing the Executive Director. Like most nonprofit boards, it is not involved in daily operations.

Prayer, discernment, consensus and listening are at the heart of how we function. The Gospel, our Vision, and the Theological and Administrative Principles are our foundation. Although prayerfully discerning our structure is an ongoing process, commitment to reflecting our values within any model remains consistent.

The Governing Board continues to work to help share the gift of Centering Prayer and the contemplative practices. We have been holding bi-weekly phone meetings and will have our next in-person meeting this coming January. A Nominating Committee was formed (with Susan Rush, Joanne Warner and Adal Henriquez) to help identify willing individuals for three vacancies due to the upcoming retirement from the Governing Board of Fr. Carl Arico, Mark Nowak and Ron Barnett, who have all served Contemplative Outreach tirelessly and generously on the Board (and Circle of Service) for years. Your prayer support as we continue the discernment process is most appreciated. Any input or questions you have of us are always welcome. You can find our contact information on the Contemplative Outreach website (www.contemplativeoutreach.org).

In Gratitude and Trust,
Your Governing Board

RESOURCES IN OUR ONLINE STORE



FREE DOWNLOAD

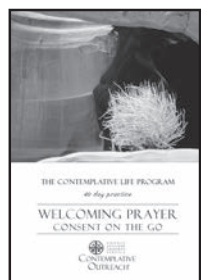
Download our free Centering Prayer Mobile App Prayer Timer for both iOS and Android. iOS Spanish-language version now available.



Thomas Keating: A Rising Tide of Silence

Now includes Closed Captioned English and subtitling in both Spanish and Portuguese

A Rising Tide of Silence is a reflective portrait of Fr. Thomas Keating by his nephew and filmmaker Peter C. Jones. Interweaving historical footage, interviews, and extensive conversations with Fr. Thomas, the film traces his spiritual journey from an affluent New York City childhood, to an austere Trappist monastic life, to his founding of Contemplative Outreach in 1984 to bring Centering Prayer to a worldwide audience. *DVD \$25 USD. Also available on Amazon instant video, xBox, Google Play, iTunes and Vimeo On Demand.*

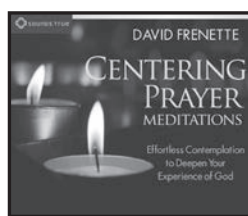


The Welcoming Prayer: Consent on the Go

A newly updated Contemplative Life Program booklet to learn the Welcoming Prayer practice - consent on the go - as well as the contextual background for its transformative process. Structured in a 40-day format, the praxis booklet includes

teachings on the human condition, nuances of the prayer practice, as well as reflections from practitioners, Scripture, and related wisdom. To support learning and practicing the prayer, each day includes a beautiful image, brief reading, Scripture, and mini-practice for the day.

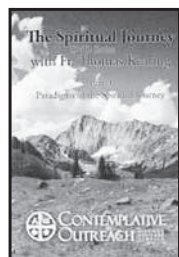
Booklet \$20 USD. Digital PDF \$10 USD.



Centering Prayer Meditations: Effortless Contemplation to Deepen Your Experience of God

David Frenette explains the essential principles of this

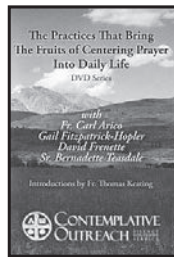
contemplative practice for both new and seasoned practitioners and guides the listener through core prayers and meditations. It is a more dynamic contemplative learning program than a book-on-tape. It augments and brings to life the written teachings of David's book *The Path of Centering Prayer*. *3 CD set \$19 USD.*



The Spiritual Journey Series

The Spiritual Journey series by Fr. Thomas Keating is now available in online video and mp3s, as well as DVDs and CDs. This series helps to reorient oneself to the psychological context of Centering Prayer, and to the contemplative dimension of the gospel and all of life. A

must for all those endeavoring to live a contemplative life. *Five-part series with six video segments per part. Online videos, \$43 each part; Mp3s, \$20 each part.*



The Practices that Bring the Fruits of Centering Prayer into Daily Life

This classic resource is now available digitally in online video and mp3s. The practices covered in this series includes Lectio Divina, Attention/Intention, Welcoming Prayer, the Prayer of Forgiveness and a talk on the Human Condition. *Online video \$15 USD.*

Mp3 files \$10 USD. Also available on DVD and CDs. Each practice is also available as a separate online video and Mp3 file, \$7 each USD and \$5 each USD.



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Photo courtesy of elpopophoto

Night of Spirit

Lover no longer at the lattice,
 Nor do watchmen know your whereabouts.
 I have lost You,
 The joy of our bonding, gone,
 The flesh of my heart flayed.
 Boned, I am weary
 Of the losing and the weeping.
 Love loosing leeches
 'Til a draining
 Too dry for living
 Brings a brittle death.
 How will I live then...
 And love.
 To have laid up so much store amiss.
 Come Beloved,
 Find me, find me, find me.

Bob Hope
 Rockport, MA

Directory

For a complete listing of the
 Contemplative Outreach worldwide contacts,
 please visit the **Community** section of our website
 at www.contemplativeoutreach.org > Community.
 Choose US or International Contacts.

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 Visit the website at
www.extensioncontemplativainternacional.org

OTHER INTERNATIONAL COUNTRIES

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fmquinn48@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE



UNITED
 IN
 PRAYER
 DAY

SATURDAY,
 MARCH 19, 2016



SILENCE
SOLITUDE
SOLIDARITY
SERVICE

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Please see the enclosed donation envelope or donate online. Thank you!

We foster a spirit of unity, generosity and utmost charity in all our relationships.

Contemplative Outreach Theological Principle #13

