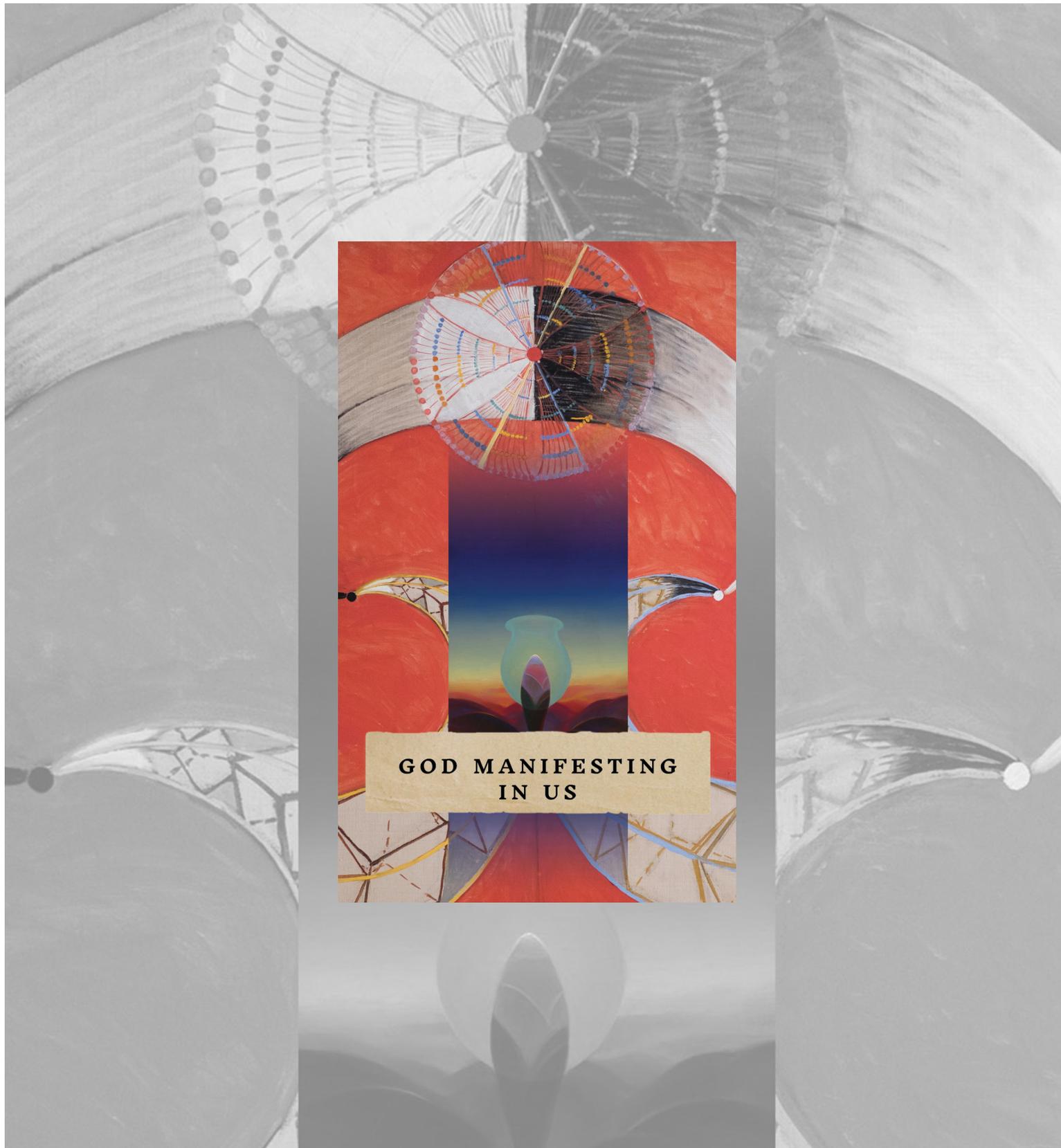


May 2020
Volume 32
Number 5



THE MARK

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



**GOD MANIFESTING
IN US**

GOD MANIFESTS IN AND THROUGH US

BY PETER HAAS

Given the vast quantity of reading content available right now to you – online and printed, I’m grateful for you taking the time to slowly take in these ideas. I wish that these words are a blessing to you, in some small yet meaningful way, especially during these stay-at-home times.

Let us journey in our mind’s eye, far, far away, and begin our story in Africa. In the Kigezi area of southwestern Uganda, there is a tropical rain forest known as The Biwindi Impenetrable Forest. The vast preserve is a symbol of unspoiled life – teeming with biodiversity, a place of pure wilderness. Hidden in the heart of that impenetrable forest are 600 or so of the planet’s remaining wild gorillas.

Such places speak to me of the mystery of the origins of human life on planet earth, and the far advances we’ve made since our species first emerged out of the deep jungles of Africa, taking the next steps toward our development toward *Homo sapiens*. For better or worse, what a journey we’ve been on since then!

The symbol of an impenetrable

forest is also an analogy for me of what it is like to speak of God: impenetrable, hidden, mysterious, living. Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth century C.E. theologian and bishop, wisely reminds us that “in what concerns God, to confess our ignorance, is the best knowledge.” Ignorance is another way of saying faith. This way of unknowing contrasted the gnostic impulse, which focused on acquiring a “secret” or special knowledge through all sorts of spiritual rites, systems or practices.

When it comes to faith, Jesus taught that we must aim to be like children. Perhaps the essence of childhood is wonder – such as the wonder of exploring an enchanted forest. Children are mesmerized by what simply is. They are in awe of what is possible, and also what is impossible. They often remain tender hearted, unburdened by the vicissitudes of life that so wear us adults down. We often let life turn the wine-joy of our child-like faith into the acidic-cynicism of been-there-seen-that-despair.

Part of our sense of sadness with the state of things, even despair

with some of our human ways of life on planet earth, is perhaps grounded in the fact that sometimes on our journeys we lose touch with the possibilities of our own further spiritual development and growth. We also give up hope that anyone else might change, grow or develop. If you want to find evidence that nothing will change, look around. There is plenty of proof that while history doesn’t repeat itself, it most certainly rhymes with itself, generation by generation.

But there is also plenty of proof that individuals and groups within the overall species are changing, growing, evolving, and choosing new ways of being – right now. As Victor Frankl reminds us, our last freedom is our ability to respond. The question is what part of us is responding? Is it Personality? Essence? A cluster of grumpy ‘I’s? Are we even awake as we respond? How are you using the profound gift of your freedom to respond?

The 15th century theologian Nicholas of Cusa called God *posse ipsum* – literally, Possibility itself. For Cusa, and other writers of the apophatic (way of un-knowing), God

is the Infinite – the not bounded, the unknown, the impenetrable. Perhaps, God is possibility itself because God is grounded in total freedom, a freedom that arises from the completion of being loved and giving love. Love more than anything else frees us and completes us, making anything possible. If it is that way with us, could it be that way with God?

Our way of understanding locates God as the love that always unfolds, enfolds and explicates the boundless, manifest universe – with all its suns, planets, forests and species. The sixth century mystic Pseudo-Dionysius lucidly draws a similar picture of God: “in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence, amid the deepest shadow [God] pours overwhelming light on what is manifest.” In this light, what is impenetrable becomes a little more observable. And though we may not know with perfect certainty where we are going, or what to do, we are given inner guidance that helps us navigate the mystery we confront as beings of freedom, possibility and love.

What might all this mean for

you and me? Here are a few hints. Like pebbles thrown into the pond of our communal mind-space, I wonder where the ripples will go....

First, there’s no better location than you, right here, right now, wherein God can manifest in and through you. You don’t need to improve yourself before it can occur. Perhaps all that is required is consent and openness to the presence and action of God, especially experienced as the God-Imminent-Spirit.

Second, where God and you unite – just there, that and then – is your eternal home, a refuge always available to come home to, no matter how perplexing or painful life might be. This union, this center, is always your home away from home, wherever you might be. And, like the eye of a hurricane, it will hold center while everything else gets consumed. Sit down. Close your eyes. Breathe. Be still. Be silent. Return to your sacred word and wait for the inner fog to dissipate. Our inner fogginess only temporarily hides our abiding union.

Third, where God and you

unite, there is an ongoing, life-long transforming union where we are never the same, and perhaps God is never the same too. This union is life-giving, in that what manifests through you isn’t exactly yours. It is partly yours, but it really belongs to the mystery of the union of God and you – which is Christ. That’s one reason why what manifests through you may sometimes feel like an effortless flow. It’s not coming solely from your I/me/mine, it’s coming from a deeper we/us.

Fourth, the primary fruit of all spiritual manifestation is love. Faith, hope, joy, wisdom are there too. But love crowns and completes all spiritual manifestation. Where love is missing, most likely one will keep missing the mark. And, out of love, the mark will keep showing you where and how you are missing it.

Drawing all this to a close, the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that what was hidden in the darkness of silence, and the fog of sleep, has now been revealed. Jesus is the Way, in part because Jesus models manifestation. As St. Paul declared

continued on page 4

to the philosophers of Athens, *what you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you* (Acts 17:23). Through an unyielding consent to God, Jesus teaches us that no matter how mysterious life might seem, no matter how impenetrable a circumstance, relationship or problem might be, there is a way to keep letting go into God to manifest in and through you, and all your brothers and sisters, creatures and planets, the all and everything, now and always.

Finally, here is St. Paul's brilliant understanding, recorded in the book of Acts 17:22-31:

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is God served by human hands, as though God needed anything, since God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and allotted the times of their existence and the

boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for God and find God – though indeed God is not far from each one of us. For 'In God we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are God's offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we

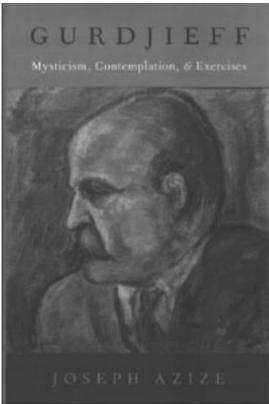
ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance of the past, in the present moment God calls to all people everywhere to change the direction they are looking for happiness.' Ⓜ

GREATER UNION

“Attentiveness to the inner voice of love (*Not my will but yours be done*, Lk 22:42) over the voices of fear and death (*Let this cup pass from me*, Mt 26:39) exemplified Jesus' commitment to love in the face of suffering; to love unto death for the sake of life. Jesus' act of ultimate love was ultimately free: *No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord* (Jn 10:8). His life recapitulates the process of evolution itself; suffering and death mark the passage from isolated existence into personal unity. The life of Jesus shows us that to live within the confines of the expected, which seems to provide stability, security, and certainty, is to be dead even when alive; to be exposed to the unexpected is to be open to the creativity of life and death. The cosmic Person (the Christ) can only emerge when humans are willing to let go of isolated existences for the sake of greater union. The power of love that evolves the cosmos toward personalization is love unto death for the sake of life. God's freedom in love is uncoercive and utterly faithful. ... To be free in love, however, we must know ourselves as being loved, and this means accepting ourselves as lovable. Jesus was free in love because he lived in truth and authenticity of being. We discover our true selves in love when we realize we are not alone and therefore have no need to defend our isolated egos.”

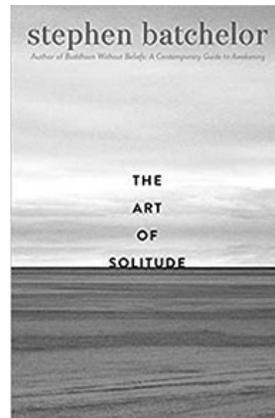
Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*

BOOK LOOK



Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises by Joseph Azize is one of the most important historic research books about The Fourth Way and Mr. Gurdjieff to be published in the last fifty years. Published by Oxford University Press in January 2020, the list price is \$99. However, this is such a significant resource, it is worth alerting you to its availability. Through deep research, practical exercises and prayers that Gurdjieff taught his students – including contemplative exercises that were only taught during his last years of life – are revealed in this book.

Also, just in time for our new “stay at home” culture, but always welcome for monks in the world, is Stephen Batchelor’s book *The Art of Solitude*. This is a lovely, accessible book of brief essays that get at the human dimension of an ordinary life of solitude. It’s an enriching read that will give you countless insights to the contemplative practice we wish to cultivate more interiorly as we work and live among others – the art of solitude. ☸



MAY SUNDAY SERMON THEMES

THE WAY OF THE DIVINE FEMININE: MOTHERS ON OUR JOURNEY

May 3	Mother Wisdom
May 10 Mother’s Day	Mother Earth
May 17	Mother Mary
May 24 Ascension Sunday	Mother Bernadette
May 31 Pentecost Sunday	Mother Spirit



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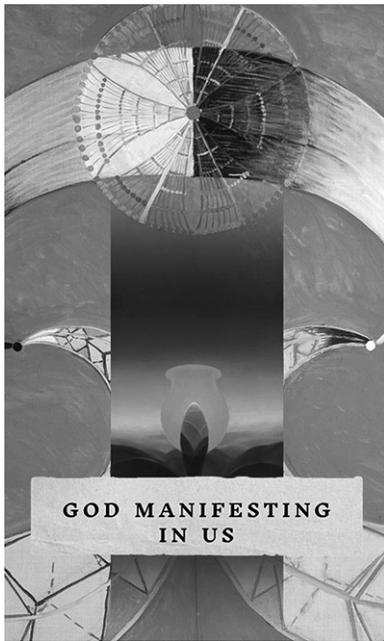
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I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6

ANNUAL AIM: THE WAY DRAWS US DEEPER

GOD MANIFESTING IN US

BY MARY GIFFORD

In a sense,
it's a "no-I" kind of project.
... It's just recognizing the truth
that there is only one self,
ultimately, and this is God
manifesting in us

and this manifests most effectively
when we're not thinking
about ourselves *at all*.

It's just being who you are
as a human being and who you are
is a rational animal that is being
deified in communion
with all other human beings.
So we are influencing other people
by our personal work
on ourselves, not for our sake,
but for the transformation
of the whole human family.

Thomas Keating, "Surrendering to Love,"
God is Love: The Heart of All Creation

[T]he Absolute Reality of the Self
is the manifestation of God
as the very core of one's existence.

David R. Hawkins, *I: Reality & Subjectivity*

*I am convinced that neither death, nor life, ... nor present things, nor
future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature
will be able to separate us from the love of God. Romans 8:38-39*

As I reflect on life events along
my spiritual journey, I have become
aware once again of the many
times that God's presence was and
is being manifested in my life. By
sharing some of these experiences,
it is my hope that you too may be
inspired to look at your own life and
be reminded of miracles and gifts of
God's presence in times of great joy
and perhaps in times of bewildering
sadness. To be awakened to the
awareness of God's continuing
manifestation in our lives is indeed
the gift of Easter.

"God is in everything, with
everything, without being identified
with anything completely."

Thomas Keating, *God is All in All*

Foundation in Christ

I have been blessed since
my arrival. I grew up in Corpus
Christi, which means Body of
Christ. My parents came from
humble beginnings and made the
most of their gifts and talents.
Both were deeply committed to
their own life in Christ and were
very active in leadership roles in
our Presbyterian Church. Our
family was so dedicated, I achieved
eleven years of perfect attendance
at Sunday school. Not only was
Church the center of our lives,
but Bible reading and study was
part of our home practice. I grew
up with Bible stories for bedtime
reading, memorizing Scripture and

the books of the Bible in order, and other Bible “drills.” My parents’ faith in God was the bedrock of our family.

Looking back on my upbringing, I believe the gift of having two parents who were honest, hardworking, and faithful Christians was indeed God being manifested in my life. At the time, however, this young Mary experienced the challenges of childhood and adolescence – being disobedient, strong willed and even defiant at times – causing her to be punished and at times harshly. I became a person both of the world and of my faith.

Because of my father’s careful planning, I was able to attend a Presbyterian college and earned a degree in music and a minor in religion and philosophy. Although I was scheduled to go to graduate school, my inner guidance intervened and declined that path.

Miracles in Life

I became very active in the musical life of Houston, where my parents had moved, and continued my organ study. I became a church organist and choir director. A friend had learned of a teaching position and encouraged me to apply. After speaking with the head of the department of music, she told me

to meet her in the superintendent’s office two days later, even though I had not completed an application. I was hired as an elementary music teacher without having all of the necessary credentials. Two weeks later, I was teaching kindergarten through sixth grade music. It was hard work and I continued praying and asking for help. Doubling a full-time job with earning the necessary educational requirements to teach was no easy life. Within a couple of years, I was ready to further my education by earning a master’s degree in music education at The University of Texas.

I completed the degree and was hoping to be hired as a junior high school music teacher in Austin that fall. No jobs were available in my field at the time; but shortly before school started, a position became available. I was hired and spent three years at one school before transferring to a school closer to home. It didn’t take long before I started dating a fellow teacher. Actually, just before school started, I had seen him teaching a young boy with cerebral palsy how to swim in my apartment’s pool. I was mesmerized by his patience with the young boy. I had no idea that we would be teaching in the same school. Within a few months, we were married. Surely God’s

hand was in this.

My husband started a business even as he continued teaching. I became the book keeper, and we began a family with two daughters. There were ups and downs over the years of marriage until a situation occurred that brought the relationship to a halt. After a contentious divorce, I was left angry and bereft. Mostly, I was angry at God. I sought counseling. Why...how could this happen?

A friend recommended that I get help from one of the priests at her Episcopal church. God was surely being manifested in my life as I began weekly sessions with him. I was to do the following: 1) read nothing but Holy Scripture, 2) partake in the Eucharist at least once each week, 3) pay attention to my dreams, 4) journal, and 5) meditate. This priest was schooled in Jungian psychology and was a student of the work of Ira Progoff, who had developed guidelines for a method of process meditation. Progoff was also known for his translation of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This is before I knew anything at all about the work of Fr. Thomas Keating.

As I look back on the journals of this period, I read passages of great emotion, mostly intense anger, as I traversed through this journey. I continued to work with this priest

and also with a couple of prayer warriors who prayed with and for me. The priest and I participated in a burning bowl ceremony of writing out all the negativity that I wished to be rid of and then burned the list in prayer knowing that forgiveness was mine to accept. I was lifted up out of the mire of negative emotions through God's presence and action.

In order to return to teaching, I had to earn nine hours of credit at the graduate level. Immediately upon completion, I applied for a job. Again, through a series of improbable occurrences, I interviewed for a part-time job at a middle school teaching general music and guitar. However, I did not know how to play the guitar. The principal responded that the previous teacher had ordered a video series on "How to Play the Guitar" and I was hired. What in the world did God have in mind?

I worked hard to learn and practice the guitar, but finally called on an old friend and fellow music teacher for help. He had shared with me that his students had come to him and asked him to teach them how to play the guitar. He had told them he didn't play, but he was willing for them to learn together. If it worked for him, could it work for me? I asked my friend if he would be willing to practice with me. I would even throw in a meal! God

works in mysterious ways. This old friend became my husband.

Ed and I lived and shared our spiritual journey for twenty-five years. We shared our Episcopal faith, our music, our love of books and nature and gardening. We practiced Centering Prayer, went to retreats in New Mexico led by Fr. Richard Rohr, attended presentations by Fr. Keating whenever we learned he was in the nearby vicinity.

Ed became ill with a form of cancer in 2006. After months of treatment, he departed this world. My grief was deep.

Going Deeper in Community

A few months after Ed's passing, an international gathering of Contemplative Outreach met in Houston. It would be my first opportunity to venture out and participate in such a large gathering by myself. I felt uneasy, but hopeful. It was an extraordinary gathering. Fr. Rohr and Fr. Keating were both present. God's presence was being manifested to all who were present, including this grieving widow.

Shortly after Ed's passing, I was invited to a presentation by Truth Be Told, an organization that engaged women prison inmates on a path of transformation. I was impressed by the mission of this group and soon became a facilitator myself.

The leaders of this program were deeply spiritual and were dedicated to providing a path of healing and wholeness to the inmates. At a leader's meeting, I saw an intriguing book on the reading table of one of the facilitators entitled *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* by Maurice Nicoll. I asked my friend to tell me about this book knowing that it had a connection to The Church of Conscious Harmony. Her reply was, "We don't really talk about it. Just go to the class on Thursday evenings."

After attending the class and, by the Grace of God, I wanted to learn more. To continue participating in the class weekly, I needed to read the assigned *Commentary* so I purchased Nicoll's entire set of six volumes, which includes the Index.

Right away, I learned through the Work of Inner Christianity that this person Mary was made up of many 'I's. Though the story of my life had been understood and lived as a devoted Christian, it was now being led to a deeper and more enlightened understanding of my relationship with God. Through the Work, I learned to recognize the negativity in my life and to see those 'I's, to let go of them, and to affirm in a deeper understanding what it means to be a child of God. I am sustained by the Work principals

and am faithful to the study and the practices.

As *The Way* draws me deeper, I remain active in a Spiritual Journey group and Centering Prayer support groups, have a Work partner, participate in Seva at CCH, as well as serve the community outside the church. I am richly blessed by my companionship with each of you who are part of the community of CCH, whether we have met or not. We are one in Spirit.

Presently, I am challenged by broken relationships in my family. While experiencing situations of loss and sadness, I have Work practices to keep me in the presence of God. By self-observing, non-identifying, and Self-Remembering that “God is All in All,” I return to the peace of His presence. I pray often – place and time do not interfere – for the needs of friends and family, our church community, the pandemic that affects us all, especially the health workers and those who have contracted the disease. I pray in silence in Centering Prayer and pray in words as the Spirit leads.

Miracles continue to happen. My ex-husband, who is now a widower, and I have our phone alarms set for a certain time each day so that we can join together (wherever we are) in

prayer for our two daughters, grandchildren, and more. Before the pandemic, we had lunch together every six weeks to share our journeys. Now, we visit on the phone. My 103-year old mother, an inspiration, still reads her Bible daily. As I approach the 83 year of this blessed life, I continue seeing the thread of God’s awe and wonder, seeing how God works in mysterious ways, and how it’s all in God’s hands.

How Is God Manifesting in You?

What is your reflection? I offer you the opportunity to take a look and possibly write out a summary of your journey so that you too can see and acknowledge God’s presence being manifested in your past and ever present in your life as it unfolds.

“May all be well and may all manner of things be well.”

Julian of Norwich

Thanks be to God. ☉

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.

Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *Lectio Divina*.

One principle appears in these pages each month.

GUIDELINE 28

The goal of genuine spiritual practice is not the rejection of the good things of the body, mind, or spirit, but the right use of them.

No aspect of human nature or period of human life is to be rejected but integrated into each successive level of unfolding self-consciousness.

In this way, the partial goodness proper to each stage of human development is preserved and only its limitations are left behind.

The way to become divine is thus to become fully human.

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

WE HAVE A RIGHT NOT TO BE NEGATIVE BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: Negative Emotions and Violence

The Work is clear and clean when it comes to negative emotions. Like a sword drawing forth from a scabbard. The Work explains that negative emotions are the basis for all violence. It exposes that negativity is a source that will always change your state. Once you are in a negative state, all interpretations of events, all facts, even your own personal historical record becomes changed and twisted. These things are altered to support your state, your frame of mind. We alter the past to justify the present. For example:

The wife hasn't called back. The husband insists the wife intentionally didn't call back. He has been waiting at least five minutes, no closer to 15. Come to think of it, she infrequently does this. She doesn't think of him while he is away, at least not the same as he does of her. He now realizes, he labors endlessly for this family. Perhaps it is just the paycheck that is the value he brings. The more

he really thinks about it, it is clear that she doesn't miss him while he is away. He really needs to consider this moving forward.... His phone rings,

"Hello Dear," she says, "Darn kid stole my phone. How I've longed to hear your voice."

One negative thought led him down that road of unreality.

Work Source: "Are you certain that when you are negative towards someone all that you know about that person is turned in the opposite direction in comparison with what you know when you do not hate that person? ... It is the emotional state that arranges such truths, such knowledge as you have, either in one way or in another ... All negative emotions cause misunderstanding, either of people or ideas. A suspicion arises in your breast that the other does not love you properly or loves someone else – does not this beautiful little arrangement called love immediately cease? So what does all of this mean? It means that the injection of an evil

thought can change everything in you. Why? Because it incites an emotion that is negative. All negative emotions, of which there are many, many and many varieties, will arrange Truth in a wrong order. So therefore understand why it has been said several times recently that the emotional state determines the arrangement of truths and knowledge in your mind. From this you will see why so much importance is given to resisting, overcoming, separating from and struggling against negative emotions." Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 1469.

Application: The state of being in love, the state of being hungry, the state of being in fear of the unknown. We exist in states, in 'I's. Negative emotions alter states. In this current time, we hope for things unseen, e.g. vaccines. For you, for me, we are asked to stay home – to *be* home. For the sake of our community, we are asked to be without our community. These changes, temporary or not, along with many unknowns, inevitably trigger fear. From time immemorial, changes have always

caused fear. Fear can be a negative emotion to be observed. Observe this fear! We want to inch back to the known, the comfort zone. However, can you see how we have always lived in the unknown, the impossible – the glorious impossible? It was just not clear to us. Our want of permanency doesn't make it so. Our repetitive routines do not make it permanent. Our habits have been exposed. The fragility of our culture and way of life lay bare. We are given a generational opportunity to step back and Observe, Non-Identify and Self-Remember. As the Work tells us "You have a right not to be negative." Thanks be to God for the Work.

Further Resource: "A belief in the finality and irreversibility of 'negative emotion' implies a refusal to accept the precariousness and the risk that attend all finite good in this life. Indeed, the good that people do is always in the realm of the uncertain and of the fluid, because the needs and sufferings of people, the sins and failures of people, are constant, and love triumphs, at least in this life, not by eliminating 'negative emotions' once for all, but by resisting and overcoming it anew every day. The good is not assured once for all by one heroic act. It must be recaptured over and over again." Thomas Merton, Introduction to *Gandhi on Non-Violence* 

BAPTISM CLASS

If you wish to be baptized
or renew your understanding of baptism,
you are invited to join us for:

Four Saturdays, May 9-30
9-10:30 am via Zoom

Please register online or by calling the church office.

Baptism is done to us.

It is the sheer gift of God. Eternal life begins in us.

We are the sons and daughters of God, incorporated into Christ's body.

His spirit dwells in us. All our sins are forgiven.

The darkness of our ignorance and weakness of our will are being healed.

And if anything is lacking to us,

Christ, who is interceding for us at the right hand of the Father,

will give us that too. Christ is ours by Baptism.

It only remains for us to become what we are and to enjoy what we possess.

Thomas Keating, *Awakenings*

MAY CALENDAR

For more details, visit
consciouharmony.org
or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
May 6 9am-noon via Zoom
Preregister online or with office.

Adult Online Baptism Class
May 9, 16, 23, 30
9-10:30am via Zoom
Preregister online or by calling the office.
Baptism Sunday May 31 is tentative.

Gurdjieff Music
May 26 7:30-8:30pm

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Caritas Donations - to continue our long standing partnership, please consider making a donation of food or money directly to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

Sundays
*Lectio Divina 8-9am
*Worship Service 10-11:30am

Wednesdays
*Contemplative Communion Service
6:30-7:15pm

Thursdays
*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

DAILY

*Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

*Join these services via Zoom video conferencing. Contact the website for instructions.

Recordings of services are available through the Bookstore and online at www.consciouharmony.org



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ASCENSION & PENTECOST



Gloria in Excelsis Deo!

The grace bestowed by the Ascension of Jesus is the divinization of our humanity . . . Our life is a mysterious interpenetration of material experience, spiritual reality and the Divine Presence. The key to being a Christian is to know Jesus Christ with the whole of our being. It is important to know His sacred humanity through our senses and to reflect upon it with our reason, to treasure His teaching and to imitate Him. But this is only the beginning . . . It is to the transcendent potential in ourselves – to our mind which opens up to unlimited truth, and to our will which reaches out for unlimited love – that Christ addresses Himself in the Gospel with particular urgency . . . We are in God and God is in us, and the unifying force is the Spirit. To live in the Spirit is the fulfillment of every law and commandment, the sum of every duty to each other, and the joy of oneness with everything that is.

Thomas Keating, The Mystery of Christ