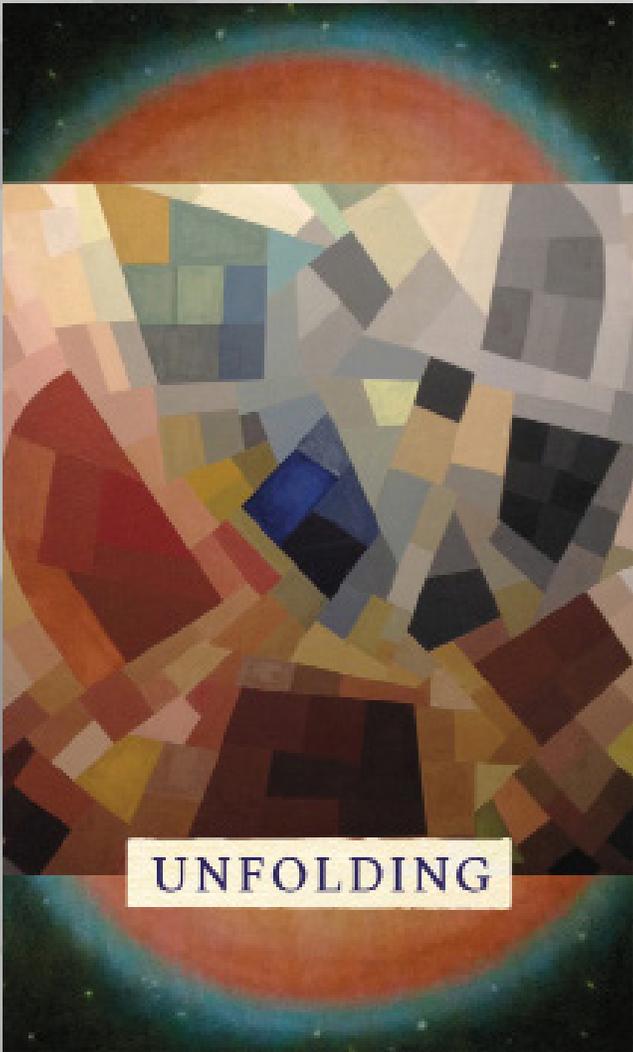


February 2021
Volume 33
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THE MARK

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



UNFOLDING

UNFOLDING

BY PETER HAAS

A year ago, this month, I observed I was getting very sick on my 10-day Centering Prayer retreat at New Camaldoli Hermitage. Concerned, I decided to return home to Austin, leaving my retreat early. Though not certain, I have a hunch it was most likely COVID-19, and I observed as a result, an intensified fear in my emotional center. Like so many of us, it was my first brush with the disease that would increasingly become a major factor in our lives during the unfolding turbulent months of 2020. For the next eight months, I dealt with lingering intestinal pain and other odd symptoms that came and went. The symptoms did not completely go away until I had an energetic healing session with beloved church members Fred and Chris Sams.

Our Unfolding Community

Since that initial encounter with COVID, our lives and community have been upended by the pandemic. We are all still living with the upheaval. For example, I recently

attended a small wedding. There were 30 people physically present in the room, but 600 hundred participating and attending via Zoom. The bride and groom had friends and family from China, India, Israel, Uganda, Mexico, and many states around the country. It was a global event on the scale of one small family's life, something that would never have unfolded without the impact of COVID and the technological evolution of Zoom.

So too, throughout the last year, many in our community have lost jobs or been laid off. Many have navigated schooling children from home. We have many in our community who have spent most of the year at home. The Year of COVID has brought an end to many aspects of life as we knew it, and has also brought a new beginning to new aspects we never imagined.

One of those new aspects that I never imagined would, could or even should happen at The

Church of Conscious Harmony is an increasing reliance upon on-line video technology to live-stream and pre-produce worship services, classes, and retreats. Nevertheless, such is our way of life and worship now. It turns out that this unfolding new technology our Church is embracing is expanding our connection with many seekers around the country and world who wish to make God devotion the center of their lives. Many new friends are connecting with our core offerings of Centering Prayer and the Work of Inner Christianity. COVID ushered us into a new level of being; not just a local or regional community, but also a global community. This is both challenging and a blessing.

I am inviting all of us to energetically welcome our new friends among us. Perhaps it will require more patience as you actively listen to a new friend struggle to understand Work ideas in your Journey Group. Or perhaps it will require a deepened understanding

of External Considering as you participate in the Thursday Class of The Journey School. We are all unfolding in different ways, and on different timelines, and although the cadence of our unfolding may be different, we are all unfolding toward and in the same light of God's grace and love. Like the Texas hill country wildflowers, we are an unfolding community blooming at different times, yet growing toward the same golden sunshine of Truth.

Our Unfolding Understanding

One of the joys of being on the spiritual journey and remembering one's journey is the gift of increasing perspective. Keeping a journal helps us to remember, and during the early months of the year, it is useful to review one's journals. As I read mine, I find delight in remembering the Peter I was thirty years ago, just starting out on my adult faith journey. I was a very zealous and quiet Christian. I was passionate about reading the Bible and prayer.

I loved going to worship at church and enjoyed my youth group very much, especially our retreats. Little did I know then that I was a pre-emergent Contemplative. Hidden beneath my 18-year-old insecurities and Evangelical zeal was a future esoteric, contemplative Christian. So much would need to first unfold in my life for that way of being to evolve and emerge in full.

At the wedding I recently attended, I was reminded by the young couple and their friends of an earlier stage of my spiritual development. I could see their zeal and sense of certainty about their faith. I could hear their clarity of what they believe the truth to be. I could see my younger self in them. I observed in me a small inclination to help them understand the developmental spectrum of consciousness and that they wouldn't always think the way they do right now. I wanted to encourage them to remain more open, but I didn't, and that is good. I simply listened to them and

affirmed them in their perspectives and present understanding of truth, without needing to agree or disagree with the content of their verbal articulation.

I owe that acceptance, in part, to the Work of Inner Christianity. Particularly the application of the Work idea of Externally Considering paired with an experiential understanding of the nature of First, Second and Third Forces. I have discovered that there is a way of understanding others wherein I can see their truth simultaneously and within the great spectrum of all Truth. I have discovered joy in finding the kernel of truth in everyone's perspective and in everything. In this practice, I have discovered that hiding beneath everyone and everyone's truths and ideas is a kind of living Presence. We might call it the Logos or even the Holy Spirit. And this Presence hiding within and under each truth discloses itself more and more, unfolding in and through us and our ideas, so as to

use whatever level of Being we may be at, and wherever we might be on the spiritual journey to help us discover more of our self and more of Itself, the living Presence of Love and Wisdom.

I recognize the difficulty of seeing the hidden truth within and under certain ideas and people we may seemingly completely disagree with. But that is, perhaps, only because we tend to think of truth as rational ideas conveyed through words – written, spoken and or even sometimes yelled. But what if truth were less about rationality and more about relationality? What if truth is grounded in a personal relationship? What if the ultimate revelation of truth isn't an idea, but a loving presence we participate in together?

Another way of seeing truth is that it is the sum of one's facts. I first heard the expression, "sharing my facts" at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I like that expression very much. It is, I think, another way of saying, "this is my understanding." One's personal facts are accumulated over a lifetime, and often crystalize into personality and level of Being. However, one is always more than one's facts. We can cultivate new facts; new being. We are all unfolding, and more truth, different facts, await our discovery *ahead of us*

or deeper in our timeline.

Our Unfolding Journey

In our January sermon series, we explored our Annual Aim theme, "Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts." One idea that spoke to me deeply was the phrase "the roots of the eyes are in the heart." This connects with a further phrase I like that says, "we see what we be." Both of these statements help remind us that there is great responsibility and possibility when we begin to awaken and ask for Truth to open the eyes of our hearts. Such a request invites new levels of Being to begin to emerge. Such a wish initiates the unfolding of latent spiritual fruitfulness, designed to emerge in and through us for the next phase of our personal growth.

The amazing thing is that while "we see what we be," we can change who we be. The Work of Inner Christianity and the Work of Silence in Centering Prayer fuse with the Grace of the Holy Spirit and these Influences begin to change, transform, unfold, and evolve our being in such a way that little by little our seeing becomes more comprehensive, inclusive and understanding.

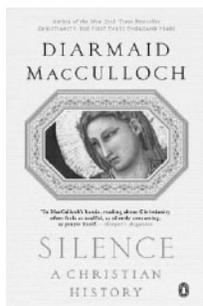
The phrase "little by little" is an important caveat, since all unfolding takes time. As Mr. Gurdjieff taught,

time is a factor. That is one reason why the liturgical calendar, year by year, season by season, is so helpful in charting our unfolding journey. In fact, the season of Lent, which begins Ash Wednesday, February 17, is an ideal time to see how, little by little, Lent unfolds and reveals more of our self to our self. It's an important time of the year, a pre-emergent time, a waiting time, to do inner work. To wish for the cleansing and opening of the eyes of the heart, and to fertilize the roots of the eyes grounded in the heart with silence, wisdom and higher influences.

Ordinarily, we can't see or know what awaits us in our future. But we can set our aims, make our wishes, and see by way of future memory. As I reflect on all that has unfolded in the past year, I also enter into the imaginal realm, and perceive what might be, ahead of us, a year from now. I see the unfolding goodness of a community reunited in person, after a long COVID winter, and I see a blooming Church, bearing fruitfulness and abundance in every dimension. I see a global community, interconnected by God devotion, The Work and meditative practice. I see a Church that has more deeply and truly become the broken and resurrected Body of Christ. ☉

BOOK LOOK

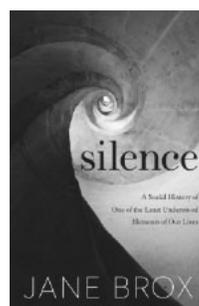
THE WORK OF SILENCE



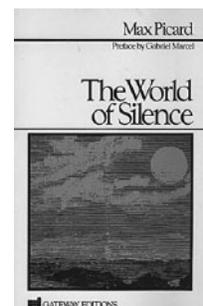
Silence: A Christian History
by Diarmaid MacCulloch



A History of Silence
by Alain Corbin



Silence
by Jane Brox



The World of Silence
by Max Picard

Much of our focus this year will be on key Work ideas that help unload the emotional center. This month's Book Look books pair the Work with what we call the Work of Silence in the grace of Centering Prayer.

If you are a practitioner of Centering Prayer, you have most likely experienced an increasing appreciation for silence in your life. As we consent to God's presence and action in Centering Prayer, we enter into the embrace of silence, which beneath the thoughts is dark, rich and sometimes profound.

Paradoxically, it is useful to convey in words our experiences in the silence. These four books are exceptional and current resources that will edify and instruct you about the history and importance of silence, and the meditative traditions that nourish the stream of silence in every religion.

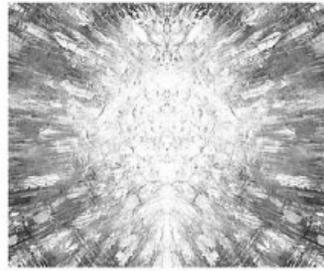
Though all these new books are essential reading for contemplatives, please pay special attention to the classic work of Max Picard, who though writing in the dark years following World War II as a German philosopher, has given to the world what may be the most exquisite reflections on the nature of silence ever compiled.

All of these would make excellent partners for your Lenten journey, which begins Ash Wednesday, February 17. Enjoy!

2021 ANNUAL COMMUNITY READING

Cynthia Bourgeault's *Eye of the Heart* pairs so well with our 2021 Annual Aim theme, *The Truth Opens Our Hearts*. It deserves to be read slowly, in small portions, so as to guide us in an interior transformation of our centers (emotional, intellectual and physical).

We look forward to robust community discussions about these rich and meaningful ideas.



TRUTH
OPENS
THE EYES OF
OUR HEARTS 2021

AIM 2021: AN INVITATION AND REFLECTION FOR ALL

At the beginning of each year, an annual aim is presented to the Church community.

All are invited to join in community

... to renew your intention and will to God

... to participate in a year dedicated to “Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts”

... to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion.

All glory to God!

As a part of the annual aim, a special theme is presented for each month

to support a focused study of the aim.

This month, we reflect and look deeper at “Unfolding,” while last month’s theme was “Opening.”

Some of the ongoing ways to participate in the annual aim are:

1. The Journey School’s annual curriculum delivered via weekly emails
2. The Journey School’s ongoing Thursday evening class
3. Twice daily Centering Prayer practice
4. Daily reading of Scripture
5. Daily study and application of the ideas of the Work of Inner Christianity
6. Daily conscious movement (e.g., tai chi, yoga, walking)
7. Eucharistic worship service
8. Spiritual companionship with the Minister, Abbess, or Minister’s designate
9. Seva group or youth education program participation
10. Commitment to attend Centering Prayer retreats annually
11. Tithing

Please prayerfully consider any or all of these offerings that are available throughout the year.

More information about The Journey School is online at consciousnessharmony.org.

To learn more about the 2021 annual aim “Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts” or to participate and receive a beautiful packet of the monthly themes, please contact the Church office.



Consecrate us in the Truth. Your word is Truth. John 17:17

ANNUAL AIM: TRUTH OPENS THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

LOSS AND LOVE BY LISA MORGAN

There are three forces –
of the body, mind and feeling.
Unless these are together, equally
developed and harmonized,
a steady connection cannot
be made with a higher force.
Everything in the Work is a
preparation for that connection.
That is the aim of the Work.
The higher energy wishes to
but cannot come down
to the level of the body
unless one works.
Only by working
can you fulfill your purpose and
participate in the life
of the cosmos.
This is what can give meaning
and significance to your life.

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of
Being, The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*

*I turned every way, but there was no one to help;
I looked for support but there was none.
Then, I remembered the mercies of the Lord.*

Sirach 51:7-8

I received a beautiful red rose and a blessing from our church founders, Tim and Barbara Cook, in May of 2004 after attending a few informational sessions on church membership. I remember feeling a special tingle in my body and having a profound sense that this was more than just “joining a church.” I had no clue as to how this would all unfold.

I moved to Austin in January 2003 with the desire to invest in rental properties and have fun. I was single and most recently lived in Atlanta and Seattle. Austin was

a laid-back smaller town with the creative energy that I desired. I dove into yoga and was looking for a meditation practice. A friend took me to an evening chanting service at The Church of Conscious Harmony – church of what? I met Tim and Barbara that night. They had just returned from St. Benedict’s Monastery in Snowmass and were high as a kite on Love. I thought, “I want that!” I returned to the Sunday Service and never left.

Centering Prayer became my meditation practice and the Work of Inner Christianity my foundational

teachings – the two legs of our Church. Over the past 16 years, I have experienced many highs and lows on the spiritual journey. Layers and layers continue to unfold. Life happens in the only way it can.

2020 has unfolded in the most unexpected way, aside from COVID-19. My mother's husband died in late March after spending a couple months in a nursing home. Mother has endured anxiety and deep depression for the past three years, mainly brought on by her husband's declining health. She expressed a low-grade hostility towards Dean that I had never witnessed before. I knew it was grounded in fear, but I still experienced resentment towards her. Dean was 88. He had a good life and was the kindest man I ever met – he loved my mother deeply for close to 30 years.

In September, I received an ominous phone call from my sister. "It is time to come home." My dad died the day after I arrived. Earlier in the year, I had been in Ohio to celebrate his 89th birthday on July 18th. I sensed it would be his last. I did my best to be present and grateful while making it joyous and fun. My dad and I never had spiritual conversations as he did not attend our Methodist church growing up. We did not pray in

the home...ever. Well, maybe at Thanksgiving. But in the last hours, Dad called out for God to take him. He knew in the final hours he was going "home."

I was privileged to spend the early morning hours with Dad on the day he died. Very few words were spoken. I just rubbed his skinny body and held his hand while he laid in the fetal position. I lost a sense of time during this moment. I imagined how he must have held me as an infant and rubbed my body. It was just presence and I was a silent witness radiating as much love as I could. There were no more words to be spoken, no reminiscing, just the power of touch – my dad's last gift to me.

After Dad's funeral, I got together with my high school teacher, Miss Grey. We remained dear friends all these years. Miss Grey never married and did not have children of her own. However, she mentored and loved hundreds of students during her 30-plus years as an art teacher. Her friendship had a significant impact on my life. On that warm September evening in Ohio, I sat in a lawn chair in her front yard while she sat on her porch. We had big laughs talking about "remember when...." Two weeks later, Miss Grey died in her home alone. She was 78. It was

a shocking phone call from her nephew. Oh God, thank you for that last visit!

Experiencing the loss of three significant people in my life within six months was a lot to handle. Tim Cook's wisdom, "If you keep your practice, your practice will keep you" helped me through this dark time. Now, life goes on and my spiritual journey encounters another layer of unfolding.

Mother arrived in mid-October to live with me and Mike (my beloved partner of 12 years). Since the death of her husband, the plan is six months with me in Texas during fall/winter and six months with my sister in Ohio during spring/summer. The good news is she has her own tiny home as a cocoon, while Mike and I have privacy in our tiny house; and we have 11 acres to roam. However, if anything was going to test my spiritual resolve, this would be it. Mother and I have always been close and share the same sense of humor. Yet, I have not spent more than a week at a time with my mother since graduating from college and moving to Atlanta in 1985.

Today, Mother and I journey to Marble Falls for the umpteenth time to fill her prescriptions and purchase over-the-counter essentials. I am no longer beating Mother up about her

diet. I guess she can eat whatever she wants as long as she chases it with digestive aids. I am so intolerant and impatient with my mother, it is embarrassing and I cringe when reflecting on my behavior! Who is *this* monster inside me – this legion of ‘I’s? Everything I hated about the way my mother treated her husband, I find myself doing to her! It’s kicking me right in the tail. My teacher arrived and the student is reluctant. Seeing this reflection is exactly what I need: You owe me nothing, I owe you everything. Externally consider. Self-observe, uncritically. Non-identify. Self-remember. Surrender and Let Go! Allow in the higher energies.

I aim every day to do my Centering Prayer, shower myself with spiritual reading (B influences) and practice yoga. I also aim to call upon the “inner stop” to slow down time between the perceived annoyance and my reaction, and to not beat myself up. This is not a competition to win, an image to preserve, a task to check off a list. This is a relationship between a mother and a daughter, an aging woman and a middle-aged woman. This is all there *is!* The moment is unfolding right in front of me. Truth is in relationship.

I have never found anything

quite this difficult. I suffer the stark contrast between my deep genuine love for my mother and my own selfish mechanical behaviors bubbling up and getting in the way. It’s a challenge to show up to this situation as the person I thought I had become based on the teachings of this church.

“Do not dwell upon your inner failings. Instead, merely accept the fact that you are an easily failing creature. Just do this: bring your soul to the Great Physician – exactly as you are, even and especially in your worst moment ... for it is in such moments that you will most readily sense His healing presence.” Teresa of Avila

But all is not lost. The power, relevance and value of the teachings are, in fact, unfolding in front of me even as they sting with the recognition of missing the mark. I am on my knees with an open heart. I need CCH. I need The Journey School teachings and the Oblate Rule. I need the sacred container that will not judge me but help to open my heart.

May Spirit unfold the resistant mechanical behaviors hindering this heart – suppressing the love and the loving support my mother deserves – the Love that all humanity is yearning for. In the lyrics of Hal David and music of Burt Bacharach, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing there is just too little of...” 

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating’s *Open Mind, Open Heart* recommends reading this spiritual journey principle three times in the method of Lectio Divina.

GUIDELINE 37

Hope springs from the continuing experience of God’s compassion and help. Patience is hope in action. It waits for the saving help of God without giving up, giving in, or going away, and for any length of time.



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My Father is still working, and I also am working.

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

IMAGINATION BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: The imagination is a powerful force that can swamp our emotional system. We are not speaking here of directed imagination or focused attention. The imagination we speak of runs rampant through all of us. It is born of pictures of ourselves that are infrequently tethered to our perceptions of reality and prior experiences in early childhood. This imagination (or illusion) often captivates in various scenarios to fear or desire, which would never occur. It is imagination that frequently keeps us up at night. Much like negativity, it doesn't require effort and feeds itself. In the Work, we are asked to struggle against imagination. This is done in the beginning through self-observation.

Work Source: "And one of the particularly wrong functions, which

we sometimes like in ourselves, is imagination ... It takes very much energy and turns thinking in a wrong direction ... Imagination has many aspects; it may be just ordinary day-dreams or for instance, imagining non-existent powers in oneself. It is the same thing, it works without control, it runs by itself. Question: Each one is self-deception? Answer: One does not take it as self-deception: one imagines something, then believes it and forgets that it was imagination." *The Fourth Way*, p. 7

Application: Observe your mind wondering into imagination. Notice what it feels like. Notice how you use imagination around common examples such as money, spirituality, the Work, the future, your family members, friends, and so forth. You'd want to know. 

INTRODUCING OUR MONTHLY PRACTICE

FEBRUARY: STAR GAZING

The Monthly Practice is a new column in *The Mark*, created by our minister, to support our Annual Aim invitation “to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion.” The Work of Inner Christianity teaches us that work on the side of knowledge plus work on the side of being equals understanding, which is the most powerful force we can create in ourselves. We invite you to actively participate in these monthly practices and evolve.

Our February theme is “Unfolding.” The practice that pairs with that theme is star gazing. Looking up, especially at the night sky, in the evening or early morning, is an extremely useful way to remind oneself that our planet is just one of billions and billions of planets unfolding in the expanding universe. Looking up at the stars helps us self-remember and humbles us. It is a useful practice to quicken the emotional disposition of worship and reverence grounded in the awe of feeling into our part in the great Ray of Creation.

Mark your calendar for star gazing and let’s self-observe as we practice together.

FEBRUARY SERMON THEMES

February 7	A Prayerful Heart: Rooted and Grounded
February 14	A Prayerful Heart: Love God
February 17, Ash Wednesday	A Deeper Seeing
February 21, 1st Sunday of Lent	A Deeper Seeing: False Self
February 28, 2nd Sunday of Lent	A Deeper Seeing: True Self

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

2-Day Welcoming Prayer Retreat
Feb 12-13 Register online.

MONTHLY

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

*Godly Play Parable Cartoon Show
Feb 13 11am

WEEKLY

Sundays
*Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
*Intercessory Prayer 9am
*Worship Service 10-11:30am
**Youth Program 1pm

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

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

Saturdays
*Scriptorium 11am
*Compline 9-9:15pm

DAILY

*Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video conferencing. Contact the website for accessible links and more information.

**All our youth are invited to participate. Contact youthdir@consciousharmony.org for details.

Recordings of services are available online at www.consciousharmony.org



THE CHURCH of CONSCIOUS HARMONY

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*Believe in the light,
that you may become sons of light.*

John 12:36

LENT

The Liturgy is the celebration of theological realities ... in an organized way using the main events in the life of Christ as the point of departure and dividing up the immense intensity of a single moment of divine union into parts, like you unpack your trunk upon arriving at your destination. The liturgical year is the unpacking of the lightning flash of the immense divine life that begins the liturgical cycle as a kind of course ... a course in ascetical practice.

It's a course in very profound theology. It's also a course in the celebration of those ideas and Christian mysticism.

Each of us plugs into it at the particular level of your own assimilation of this light, or the light's assimilation of you.

Thomas Keating

Excerpt from a talk at The Church of Conscious Harmony
December 2007

