



Refresh

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Wooed By God



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6m x 8m x 5m 2006 Oxidised stell rod sculpture. Photo Diane Gilliam-Weeks

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Song of Solomon by Dr. He Qi
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God searching for us

by Peter Stuart

In 'engaging' with 'God' (for want of better terms for this activity and its Object) I sometimes try to bypass images and words, with all their shifting ambiguity, imprecision, and capacity to distract. I try to reach 'out', or 'in', to the Void, the Mystery which I obscurely know is indeed The Reality. The apophatic way has intellectual appeal to me, for both good and bad reasons. It's a way hallowed by great spiritual teachers, and indeed my mind tells me not to mistake the sign (whatever it is) for what the sign is pointing to. But going down this path can, for me, also be a way to escape from having to wrestle with the issues of truth, and meaning, and holy, obedient living.

And so I come back to the flickering words and images which light our path into the depths of our being and into the heart of the world. And I choose to entrust myself to Christ – the Light of the world – given wonderfully, engagingly, as the Way, the Truth and the Life: the way of Incarnation in the flux of this world. Yet does the Incarnated One search for me, or I for Him?

"Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home", run the words of my Anglican liturgy. Yes, but sometimes I find myself yet again away from 'home'. I search for Him in the covenanted places – and He will be there – but by no means always. I stop searching for Him – and then He will touch me unexpectedly – but again, by no means always.

This doesn't feel like the Hound of Heaven seeking me unremittingly as I flee Him down the years. Nor do I easily identify myself with the lost sheep the Good Shepherd brings back to the fold. God may be in search of me, but I seem to be doing a lot of searching too.

It feels more like the dance of love. The dance in which one partner may have the ultimate initiative, but seems to play (so seriously) with presence and absence. A dance in which the other partner plays too: retreating, eliciting the initiative of the Beloved, rejoicing in presence, hurt by absence. *"Maidens of Jerusalem, I charge you, if you find my beloved, to tell him that I am faint with love."* (Song of Songs 5:8)

As a theological student, I once wondered why Bernard of Clairvaux and John of the Cross made so much of the *Song of Songs*. I wonder no longer. Its language, more than any other, resonates with my modest experience of the Divine.

'As a theological student, I once wondered why Bernard of Clairvaux and John of the Cross made so much of the Song of Songs. I wonder no longer. Its language, more than any other, resonates with my modest experience of the Divine.'

Dom Bernado Olivera (until recently the Abbot General of the Cistercians – OCSO) writes:

"In medieval Christian mysticism it is possible to distinguish between two aspects of the experience:

- **essential** or unitive mysticism: union with God in God's Unity and deep integration of one's own soul.
- **love** mysticism or relational mysticism: union with the divine Thou in terms of nuptial, covenant love...

...In Cistercian commentaries on the Song of Songs, it is the bridal dimension of encounter and union with the Lord that prevails.

Knowledge and love come together in this union: we know to the degree that we love and we love to the degree that we know. Love shines forth when it attains its fruit: the love of one who has fruition is wholly in the light, because fruition itself is the light of the lover."

(William, Canticle 76; 60; cf. 57)

It's not only the Cistercian tradition. Origen was the first to use this language to speak of the individual soul rather than collectively of Israel or the Church. And again and again over the centuries, in what came to be called 'bridal mysticism' or '*Brautmystic*', lovers of God have reached for this language and gained from the human experience on which this language is based. (Go, for example, to Richard of Victor, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Ruysbroek, and the Carmelites.)

And yes, sometimes this language is crassly, even embarrassingly, a patently obvious, yet unacknowledged, substitute for human sexual love. But love between man and woman does have its glorious, grace-filled similarity to love between God and those created in His image. Grace does presuppose and perfect nature.

Bernado Olivera again:

"Just as Cistercian mysticism is centred in love, so is asceticism. Ascetic effort and exercise consist in conforming our will to the will of God. When there is deep communion of wills, there is conformation, unity, marriage.

Such conformity weds the soul to the Word, for one who is like the Word by nature shows himself like him too in the exercise of his will, loving as she is loved. When she loves perfectly, the soul is wedded.... Truly this is a spiritual contract, a holy marriage. It is more than a contract, it is an embrace: an embrace where identity of will makes of two one spirit.... He and the soul are Bridegroom and Bride. What other bond or compulsion do you look for between those who are betrothed, except to love and be loved? (Bernard, SC 83,3)

To sum up, spiritual marriage is the high-point and destination of our Christian pilgrimage on the pathway of ascesis and prayer. It is not a matter of 'mystical phenomena,' but rather the possibility of our nature, created in the image and likeness of God, enabled by God's grace."

God woos me. And I and each human soul are feminine to God. (Some feminists may slay me, but it's true.) Bernard of Clairvaux was right when he described his male monks as 'brides of Christ'. The primary question in my mind is this, 'when is the wedding feast of the Lamb?'

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.



How do you woo me? Let me count the ways

*You woo me with choice
with latitude and longitude
but I tell you it was easier
when there was a line to toe*

*You woo me with patience
allowing me time to
dilly-dally, shilly-shally
as I try to choose the path*

*You woo me with a clean slate
assuring me of your love
as you beckon me on through
false-guilt and self-doubt*

*You woo me with trust
saying you're with me
through thick and thin
through death and on
into life itself*

*You woo me with deep days
of silence, solitude
my eyes feasting afresh
on the now*

*You woo me with emptiness
and I hang on as night follows night
wondering if dawn will
ever shine again*

*You woo me with the voices of the Ancients
and thoughts of other paths
and I say, Really?
Are you sure?*

*You woo me with peace
wrapping it round my heart
in a cocoon of love
allowing it to beat without fear*

*You woo me with colours of beauty
and words of wonder
with glimpses of glory
and hopes of heaven*

*You woo me with grace
gifting me wings of freedom
breaking and melting
my heart into yours*

*You woo me with mystery
until my mind abandons its need
to have neatly lined-up answers
and I am drawn into
the inexplicable depths
of fire and darkness*

Anna Johnstone

Refuelling

by Joy Cowley

Morning prayer works something like this: the old car pulls up at the service station, out of gear, brake on, engine switched off, and it waits in stillness, to be refuelled. The car has no understanding of the filling process. It is programmed for movement. It only knows refuelling and movement are connected. This pause each morning means it can run all day without faltering: no hill too steep, and no road too rough.

This doesn't mean the roads have changed. The difference is the sweet energy that's been given to the car without cost.

Yes, prayer is like that. Though a metaphor is limited and can't contain all truth. We know a prayer routine fills us with a peace that flows out into our day; but sometimes we get a little anxious about technique.

We try fitting prayer into labelled boxes and we become distressed when it doesn't conform.

I'm reminded of a woman who attended a day of reflection. This woman had 52 years of consecrated life and she was like a beacon in the group. Stillness and peace radiated from her to calm fractured energy in the room, and her smile was like a sunrise. Yet this woman went to the retreat facilitator and said she had a problem. "All my life I haven't known how to pray." For a moment, the retreat facilitator was silent with awe, then said, "Your whole life is prayer. Tell me how you do that."

When we become concerned about the way we're praying, we're unwittingly making God too small. Prayer is about awareness of the Divine Mystery in everything. Prayer is intention, the leaning of the heart towards its Homeland, communication with an energy so small it lights the eye of an ant, and so big it's the pulse of a starry night.

When the heart is leaning towards love, prayer follows close behind.

We hold the hand of a friend, feel the warmth of another life touching ours, and know in that touch – an instant of eternity. We look at a newborn baby, and while our head says, "This child is one day old," our heart tells us, "This soul is ancient and it comes with God in its eyes."

Love brings us to prayer in many ways, through beauty, delight, thanksgiving. Love heightens the senses, so ripe strawberries in a blue dish on a summer's day can carry us through wonder to the edge of Mystery.

Words will bring us to prayer if we are attentive. The repetition of liturgy can dull our awareness, but if our heart is an open bowl, then words of nourishment will leap into it with new life. We encounter God in "the fountain of all holiness" and become one "through him, with him, in him." Whatever we need will be given, if we ask with a begging heart.

Our own words to God become sacred when they're spoken from the heart. I don't mean 'pious' words but talk about the real things of life including pain, doubt, restlessness, and exhaustion. Haven't we all at times, cried from our emptiness, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And haven't we then discovered that the truth of crucifixion is resurrection, and that we were emptied so we could be filled with something greater?

Actions can bring us to prayer, the kindness of others, and the times we have reached out past the 'me first' instinct. It can be an action as small as catching the fly on the window and releasing it outside; but when we do it, we know we've stepped into a larger place and made connection with the sacred energy that exists in all life. *Through Him all things were made and without Him was not anything made that was made. John 1:1.* To act for the greater good is prayer in motion.

Listening is prayer. In times of stillness the mind will chatter trivia, but that doesn't matter. Again, it's the intention of the heart that's important. The heart is waiting. It is open. And it will be filled.

Even if our mind is unaware of what's happening, there will be another kind of knowing in us. Afterwards, we experience a calm in the body, a lightness to our steps, a peace that settles over us, and guidance when we need it.

So here I am again, Lord, the old car pulling into the service station, slow, a bit battered, but confident of the process – although I don't know how it happens. As for your fuel, I don't know what to call it, but it feels a lot like high octane love.



Pour over me by Sue Newham - www.veritasse.co.uk

Recapturing our hearts

by Deborah Bower

The depth and mystery of the human heart has captivated me over recent years. I've journeyed through barren lands, scaled the highest peaks, and swum the vast oceans of my inner being in an attempt to explore the terrain of my heart, or what some would call 'the soul'.

I can't claim this as my journey alone. I'm indebted to others who've shared the often perilous expedition to recapture their own hearts.

Scripture tells us we're made in the image of God yet I'm surely not the only one to wonder how far we've fallen from that lofty start. In John's gospel, Jesus makes an extraordinary statement about the battle for the human heart. After describing himself as 'the gate', Jesus goes on to say that whoever enters through him will have life and have it completely.

In these verses Jesus alludes to an enemy of the human soul, an enemy whose only purpose is to kill, steal, and destroy the human heart. This enemy's intention is to render us incapable or unwilling to recapture our identity as 'made in the image of God'.

I can say I've experienced the murdering destruction of this 'enemy'.

And the idea we're held captive by our fears has galvanised me to reject the tyranny of mediocrity in my relationship with the Triune God. I'm convinced that to have the life to which Jesus woos us, means the recapturing of our own heart – that deep place within us where we're fully known and where we fully know. It means allowing the saviour of our heart to take us on a journey of redemption.

For me, the journey began when I allowed God access into my story, especially areas of failure and defeat. Shame is a stinking pool that repels the most ardent explorer! Little by little I began to trust the creativity of the Holy Spirit in times of prayer and contemplation.

The character and intent of God's heart towards me began to soften the high and unassailable walls around my heart. The language between us was full of promise and hope, of healing and desire for intimacy.

Here is what I found:

God pursues us at every turn. But fear of facing unknown terrors – should we journey too far from what we know – holds us rooted in mediocrity. Fear, doubt and anxiety immobilise us and keep us captive. Disappointments, injustice, the emptiness of religiosity create the illusion that God can't be trusted, and we're rendered impotent to the full life Christ's death and resurrection won for us.

We can only journey into the depths of our heart if we have someone to go with and whom we trust completely. We need to experience the goodness of God before we're

truly able to trust our redeemer with the secret places that is our heart. Once we have complete trust in our guide then we can descend, hand in hand, into the dark places to confront the terrors that await us.

It's not enough to say we believe. The courage we need, to traverse the dark and terror-filled regions of our hearts, is born of trust and intimacy with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we willingly respond to God's wooing we find ourselves doing what Paul calls 'working out our salvation,' God working in us that we might be all we were created to be.

Like embarking on an expedition, we don't set out without careful preparation. We learn to listen to our heart's voice; its fears, doubts and anxieties. The journey is often seasonal. We don't live in a permanent place of exploration; rather we travel there spasmodically at the invitation of our divine guide.

And most importantly as we confront the terrors in the darkest places of our heart, we discover our divine guide to be our fiercest champion.

Our role in this epic battle is to persist, to stand firm, when faced with pain, emotional exhaustion, fear of failure, or the threat of being overwhelmed. And in this very place we encounter something extraordinary. Our divine guide extends an invitation to rest and be still.

Here, peace and stillness become our shields. And in this place of 'being', our champion fights for us until the enemy is routed and we are united with our divine guide. It is in this place that something quite unexpected happens, we begin another journey! This time though into life beyond imagination.

**'The language between
us was full of promise and hope,
of healing and
desire for intimacy.'**

A God who simply loves¹

from the thoughts of Brother Roger

'All God can do is love'. This conviction was expressed by a Christian thinker of the seventh century, Saint Isaac of Nineveh. He reached this conclusion after studying Saint John's Gospel for many years and meditating on the words, 'God is love' from I John 4:8.

All across the world, many among the younger generations are searching and asking themselves: Is there any hope for our future? How can we go from worry to confident trust? Our societies are sometimes shaken to their foundations. There is the uncertain future of humanity, with poverty constantly on the rise. There is the suffering of so many children, and all the broken relationships that leave hearts wounded.

And yet, even in the world's most troubled situations, do we not see on the horizon signs of an undeniable hope? In order to go forward, it is good to know this: the Gospel offers such a shining hope that it can bring joy to our soul. This hope is a path of light that opens up in our depths. Without it, all delight in living could vanish.

Where is the source of this hope? It is in God, a God who simply loves and can do nothing else, a God who never stops seeking us. Our hope is renewed when we entrust ourselves humbly to God. There is a force which dwells within us and which is the same for everyone. This force is called the Holy Spirit, and whispers in our hearts, 'Surrender yourself to God in all simplicity; the little faith you have is enough.'

But who is this Holy Spirit? He is the one Christ Jesus promised in his Gospel when he said, 'I will never abandon you. I will always be with you through the Holy Spirit, who will support and comfort you.' Even when we think we are alone, the Holy Spirit is with us. His presence is invisible, yet it never leaves us. And gradually we realise that the most important thing in life is to love with trust.

When times of doubt arise in some people's lives, we should keep in mind that doubt and trust, like shadow and light, can coexist within us. Above all let us remember these reassuring words of Christ, 'Do not be afraid or let your heart be troubled.'

In human beings there can be impulses towards violence. For trust to arise on earth, we need to begin within ourselves, making our way forward with a reconciled heart, living in peace with those around us.

Peace on earth is prepared insofar as we dare to ask ourselves: Am I ready to seek inner peace and to go forward in selflessness? Even if I have very little, can I be a ferment of trust in my own situation, understanding others more and more?

¹ Excerpts from *God is Love Alone: Three Letters to Young People* by Brother Roger of Taizé, Continuum, 2003, pp82-89. Copyright © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France.

As we remain before God in quiet waiting, will we open ways of peace-making wherever oppositions arise? When young people make a resolution for peace in their own lives, they become bearers of a shining hope whose light radiates ever further outward.

At this time in history, the Gospel invites us to love and to say it by our existence. Faith becomes credible to those around us above all by the lives we lead. This is also true for the mystery of communion that is the Body of Christ, his Church. A credibility that has often been lost can be reborn when the Church lives in trust, forgiveness and compassion, and when it welcomes with joy and simplicity. It then succeeds in communicating a living hope.

**Even when we think we are
alone, the Holy Spirit is
with us.**

**His presence is invisible, yet it
never leaves us. And gradually
we realise that the most
important thing in life is
to love with trust.**

Memory of Origins

by Anne Powell

*Earth is having one of those days:
a domestic.*

Hot plates collide and crash.

*Earth quakes and yearns for the remembered cool
of the seas' arms to reach out,
yearns for the familiarity of chaos to console her.*

*Earth does not know how much longer
she can maintain such seismic restraint
before something must give*

as in the beginning:

no-thing to be-ing

dark to light

aridity to water

seed to koru

divinity to limbs

*patterns of yielding and giving and
the only constant is chaos.*

*On a bad day, earth resists
this memory of origins.*

*On a good day, earth remembers
the creativity of chaos and
its rhythm readying her for dance.*

**From Tree of a Thousand Voices
Steele Roberts Publishers, 2010**

Spirituality and Trauma

by Robert Grant

Recovering survivors accept they can be broken, overwhelmed and rendered powerless. These realisations are not considered shameful as they were at the start of the healing journey. Eventually, they are recognised as the common ground that connects them to every form of life on this planet. Becoming comfortable with this new understanding, enables survivors to encounter the wounds of others without despair or fear. The authentic survivor wants to help other victims realise, despite the tremendous pain involved, loss of former ways of being are an opportunity to grow and to discover the Spirit who lives at our core.

Introduction

Trauma is life at its worst. Traumatic events are unexpected and horrible. Typically, they generate a variety of physical, emotional, interpersonal and spiritual problems. Lives frequently become structured around some type of addiction, avoidance behaviour and/or violence as a way of managing or holding together our sense of Reality. Professional and interpersonal relationships suffer as a result.

Trauma has been implicated in personality and eating disorders, addictions, attention deficit disorder, sexual dysfunctions and a host of somatic complaints. It is difficult to see how anything positive comes from experiences that “overwhelm abilities to cope” and “render victims helpless and/or living in fear for their lives.” (DSM IV, 1994)

While initially trauma is grounded in pain, loss, and fear, and often leads to breakdown, with proper support we can be transformed into compassionate and deeply spiritual beings.

The Dark Power of Trauma

Traumatic events have the power to assault anything considered sacred or foundational. Trauma brutally demonstrates that certain aspects of self and life cannot be contained or made sense of by the ego (the rational socially affirmed conscious self). Most victims feel lost, disoriented, and powerless when former ways of making sense are damaged or destroyed. Many lose their bearings, become unsure of who they are and have great difficulty moving forward. Many wander indefinitely until, with support, new ways of taking up Life are created.

Eating from the Fruit of Knowledge

There's a sense in which traumatised people have eaten from the 'fruit of knowledge.' They have made contact with aspects of Reality that are outside the parameters of social consciousness or consensual reality. The innocence of the 'taken for granted' has been lost forever. Old ways of understanding are exposed as inadequate. Ignoring the profound tectonic shifts that take place in the structures of self and consciousness is costly. Wounds must be integrated into new and more comprehensive approaches to

Life or victims run the risk of being saddled with a host of post-traumatic problems.

Deconstructing the Ego

Many experiences of trauma, especially those involving abuse, expose the lack of substance and cohesiveness that underlies an individual's concept of self. The average person knows themselves in terms of a web of internalisations grounded in feedback received from significant others – parents, family, teachers, coaches and ministers.

Ideally, victims of trauma will carry a lively sense of self, grounded in accurate feedback about their unique temperament and gifts. Such fortunate individuals hold a 'true' version of self that has usually been painstakingly constructed over time.

Peak, near death and mystical experiences have been known to project individuals into realms of consciousness called transpersonal or spiritual. At these times, the ego is displaced or cracked open. This enables transpersonal dimensions of consciousness to enter awareness. Despite their beauty and sublime character, sometimes these experiences are unnerving and terrifying (especially without proper preparation and guidance).

In addition to deconstructing reality horizontally (belief systems and frames of reference), trauma can bring about vertical deconstructions. This happens when people are confronted with a deeper self or 'soul' without warning or preparation. At such times the ego is wounded, displaced or obliterated. Confronting the ego's lack of unity and substance can be terrifying. Some do not recover from encountering this 'Great Naught' or Void. Some crumble and/or fragment at this time. This is the realm out of which mystics, addicts and madmen emerge.

Support and Accompaniment

Trauma typically initiates a process of deep spiritual questioning and demands victims take in more of Reality than previously possible. At this time, personal identity and the meaning of Life is questioned. Old answers no longer suffice. Priorities must be reordered. Concerns about identity, the value of suffering, the importance of justice and the appropriateness of forgiveness are conspicuous. Confrontation with the extent of evil and cruelty in the world, impacts on our images of humanity and God. We are pressed to expand our understanding of the value of being in relationship with others. All such questions demand new solutions.

Conclusion

Trauma throws victims onto a path that mystics, shamans, mythic heroes and spiritual seekers have been walking for thousands of years. The difference is that victims of trauma are required to work this territory or be overcome by it. Non-traumatised seekers have the luxury of getting off the path at will – their journey is rarely one of life and death, their search gradual and volitional. With the help of a teacher and spiritual discipline they are able to progressively assimilate the demands of this realm.

Trauma victims, on the other hand, are thrust into this territory against their will and

often with no preparation or guidance. They are forced to confront existential and spiritual truths like the inevitability of death and the absence of certainty security.

Acknowledging our fundamental dependency on others and on God is a critical milestone on the path of healing. Unfortunately, many victims of trauma are misdiagnosed and marginalised. Most are unable to find healers who recognise that trauma has thrust them onto a path of existential and spiritual questioning. Helpers often fail to be aware that an authentic ego must be established before a permanent relationship with the Deeper or Transpersonal Self can take place. In other words, one must first have an authentic ego before s/he is able to surrender it to the deeper Self and/or Spirit.

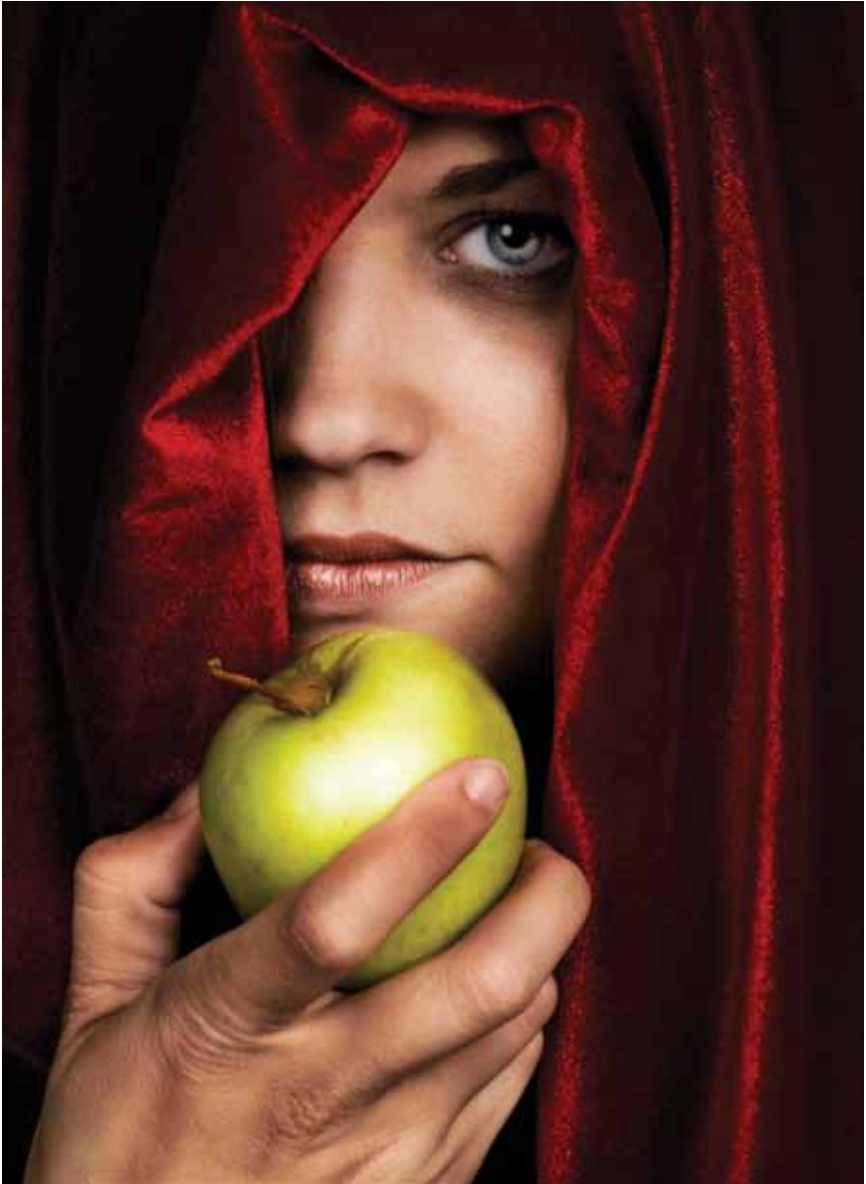
Victims need safe and supportive spaces in which to walk amidst the ashes of their former understanding of self, reality and God, while embracing transformation at every level of their being. Eventually, the ego must be seen as a partial aspect of self that is based in collective and uncritically examined values. The ego is not a human's most essential dimension. Relationships with the 'Deeper Self' must be fostered and developed.

Traumatic experiences are one of the few things powerful enough to get the ego to release its tyrannical hold over consciousness. In displacing the ego, trauma creates access to the core of Life and self.

Appropriate care, compassion and direction, enable victims to overcome the destructive impact of trauma, break through restrictive approaches to Life, and become more soulful and compassionate beings in the process.

Traumatic injuries, when accompanied by love and understanding, do not become places of deadness, denial and disease. Rather, they become bridges of compassion that connect victims to every living thing.

'Victims need safe and supportive spaces in which to walk amidst the ashes of their former understanding of self, reality and God, while embracing transformation at every level of their being.'



Temptation - Photo by Carly Short
carlyshortphotography.net

A Walk in the Garden: Wooded by the Creator

by Andrew Shepherd

The biblical narrative opens with a picture of great intimacy. The Creator reaches down and moulds an earth creature (ādām) from the earth (ādāmâ) and then tenderly draws this lifeless body close and exhales breath into the nostrils (Gen 2:7). Through an action of literal *inspiration*, humanity is brought to life. Having crafted and brought the creature into being, the creator God then sets aside a garden: a place where, humanity can live out their vocation as carers and caretakers, and enjoy the goodness of creation, each other's companionship, and the presence of their Creator.

Yet, even in what appears to be a sanctuary, a place of peace and fullness of life, there are other voices seeking to gain the attention and affection of humanity. Initiating a conversation with the woman by asking a half-truthful question, the serpent insinuates the Creator isn't to be trusted; maybe in *this* garden humanity is missing out on something more.

Of course, the narrative doesn't merely recount events that may have taken place in the past, but rather tells 'our story'. In our contemporary world, countless voices seek to woo and win our affections. Multiple suitors bid us listen to their stories and enter into their imagined world – conjured for us through words and images. Every day in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, computer screens and televisions, these voices seek to tap into our desires, appealing to us, encouraging us to spend money, to take hold of, acquire, and possess objects which – they tell us – we can't do without.

**'...here are other voices
seeking to gain the
attention and affection
of humanity.'**

The woman responds to the serpent by restating the Creator's original command (2:17), but adds her own embellishment: 'Perhaps the Creator really isn't to be trusted. Perhaps it's not the eating, but the very act of touching the tree in the middle of the garden which is to be avoided' (3:3). Swayed by the serpent's guile, the woman begins to create *distance* between herself and the rest of creation of which she is a part. Like all 'good' marketing campaigns, the serpent continues a charm offensive, insisting neither touching nor eating is a problem. Indeed, the fruit from the tree is simply an *object* which possessed and consumed, will bring true meaning and purpose to one's existence.

Her eyes are now drawn to that which was previously off-limits. Her desire awakened, the woman finds herself overwhelmingly attracted to the allures of this forbidden fruit. By the end of the conversation, seduced by the cynical and manipulative conjecturing

of the serpent, the woman has begun to see the world through new eyes. The intimacy of a 'subject-subject' view of reality is replaced by a 'subject-object' outlook. No longer a subject in its own right; creation can be objectified. Ultimately, her behaviour towards what is 'Other' is shaped by the way she perceives it¹. As time passes, the woman can't take her gaze off the fruit. The desire to have, to hold, and to devour the fruit fills her days. Each day as she passes the tree, the voice of the serpent resurfaces. She's been wooed, won-over.

Eventually succumbing to temptation, she grasps, eats, and then shares this seeming satisfaction of *desire* with her partner. The result: "the eyes of both were opened" (3:7). Ironically this new vision leads, not to greater intimacy, but to vulnerability and fear. Originally, the earth creatures see themselves and the created world as equal subjects, different and distinct from themselves: mysteries to be related to and known. But now the world and their companion are understood as detached objects.²

While previously at ease with their bodies, and happy to be *seen* by the Creator, the earth creatures now become aware of their nakedness. The hospitable Creator, who has, in a moment of *ekstasis*, intimately breathed the gift of life into the nostrils of the earth creature, is now to be feared and hidden from. If, as fallen humanity now mistakenly believe, intimacy and knowledge mean 'control-over' and grasping that which is Other, what prevents their Creator – the Divine Other and source of *all* such knowledge – from violating them?

With their newly distorted sight and misshapen perception of *knowledge*, humanity understandably now seeks to hide from its own Creator. Intimacy is displaced by fear and shame. *Attachment gives way to detachment*.

In our contemporary world we have become aware of the wiles and ways of advertising and marketing. We know advertising works on tracking and inflaming our deepest desires. Paradoxically, even the knowledge we're being seduced and wooed doesn't necessarily liberate us. Advertisers are aware we know, that they know, we know they're manipulating our vision, captivating us with products that can't truly fulfil or transform our lives as promised. Yet even mutual knowledge of half-truths and distortion of reality doesn't end this courting ritual. Like moths to a flame, we seem helpless to prevent our eyes and hearts from continuing to be drawn to these images as the wooing becomes more subtle, or as is increasingly the case, more brazen³. So how can we overcome these voices?

1 My thought here is influenced by the work of phenomenologists, such as Emmanuel Levinas.

2 Cf. Sallie McFague: *Super, Natural Christians* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

3 Perhaps the archetypal shameless product currently being advertised is the service offered by Ashley Madison. We know from the history of relationships that secret affairs and adultery inevitably lead to the devastation of marriages, families, and personal lives, yet Ashley Madison openly markets the desirability of such encounters. Life is Short: Have an Affair®. (A registered trademark, no less.) A business specialising in encouraging lies, deception and infidelity, while posing as glamour and happiness. Why be wooed once? Perhaps a second experience of being wooed or wooing another will satisfy the current failings and deficits of our existing relationship?

One approach, often suggested, is to seek to escape from the contemporary culture of consumerism which surrounds us. Many proponents of this strategy suggest the embracing of a new form of asceticism in which we turn off our radios, televisions, computers, and smart-phones in order to avoid the constant wooing voices of advertising.

Of course, such an approach isn't new. Early Christian fathers and mothers headed into the wilderness to disengage from the temptations of power and wealth. They sought to rediscover the vibrancy and vitality of faith which was lost in the Church's cultural captivity within the Empire.

And, yes, there are moments in life when the cacophony of voice is so overwhelming and distracting we must find space and time to withdraw. The importance of solitude and retreat, where, to paraphrase the prophet Hosea, one can be led into the wilderness to be allured and hear words of tenderness (Hos 2:14), can't be underestimated. And for many in Christian history, including myself, time alone with the Creator in the wilderness of undistracted time and space remains a critical part of the spiritual journey.

Yet no matter how enriching, these times in the wilderness are purely episodic. Ultimately, it's unfeasible to live a genuine human life detached from people, places and possessions, utterly deaf to seducing voices, ignoring the fruit on the many trees that surround us.

Early Christian ascetics realised, instead of long-term relief, escape into the wilderness often heightened temptation. Silencing exterior enticing voices simply increased the volume of their own inner voices of desire.⁴

The impossibility of escape from the voices of temptation suggests a better approach would be to honestly confront those wooing voices, recognise their allure, and then, empowered by grace, choose to respond differently. First and foremost, such an approach requires us to acknowledge that ultimately, as humans, we're less 'thinking machines' than 'desiring machines'. What makes us human isn't so much our rationality as our desires, in particular our yearning for relationships and intimacy.

Indeed, for Augustine, as well as other church Fathers, *desire* was understood positively. *Desire*, aroused by, and inflamed by the Father's love for us, functions in drawing us back towards the loving God who alone can answer our deepest longings and meet our need

**You arouse us so that
praising you may bring us
joy, because you have made
us and drawn us to yourself,
and our heart is restless until
it rests in you.¹**

Augustine, *The Confessions*

4 Perhaps the classic example of this is the life of Anthony as recounted by Athanasius in his *The Life of Anthony*.

for communion. In the famous words of St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁵

Once we recognise *desire* is central to our very composition as humans made in the 'image of God', we can begin to respond to the particular problems caused by the alternative wooing voices of contemporary consumer culture. In his book, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, William T. Cavanaugh persuasively argues that contrary to popular sentiment, greed **isn't** attachment, but rather *detachment*. That we perceive ourselves as *detached* – that is *separate* and *distant* – from what is Other (whether human or non-human), is the very basis for acquiring consumer items and/ or relationships. Their subsequent use, and ultimately their disposal, frees us up for the acquisition of the next commodity. Cavanaugh writes:

In consumer culture, dissatisfaction and satisfaction cease to be opposites, for pleasure is not so much in the possession of things as in their pursuit. There is a pleasure in the pursuit of novelty, and the pleasure resides not so much in having as in wanting. Once we have obtained an item, it brings desire to a temporary halt, and the item loses some of its appeal. Possession kills desire; familiarity breeds contempt. That is why shopping, not buying itself, is the heart of consumerism. The consumerist spirit is a restless spirit, typified by detachment, because desire must be constantly kept on the move.⁶

Cavanaugh's insight that consumerism is grounded, not in attachment but detachment, is significant. If we're ultimately subjects of desire, constantly seeking a depth of intimacy our culture of detachment and restlessness can't provide, then perhaps part of a solution would be to cultivate and nourish a spirituality of *attachment and embeddedness*.

Paradoxically and counter-culturally, it's arguably in a life of domesticity, *attached* to a specific place and particular people, that we truly become 'fully alive' as desiring and desired beings, open to the wooing of God. In contrast to consumer culture where Others (human or non-human) are reduced to mere 'things' or objects, being grounded in a single location with various attachments (family, house and garden, neighbours) provides the ideal setting for the development of true vision. Spending long periods in relationships in a particular place within creation helps us overcome our tendency to objectify and allows us to begin to see all Others as 'subjects' and not objects. And over time subjects unfold to us the beauty and the mystery of their Otherness.

In the midst of this context, knowledge of our partners, our children, our community, local flora and fauna, God's presence and activity grows, yet at the same time they all mysteriously remain beyond our comprehension. While perhaps less 'exciting' than an

5 Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, 2nd ed. (New City Press, 1997), I.i, 39.

6 William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 47.

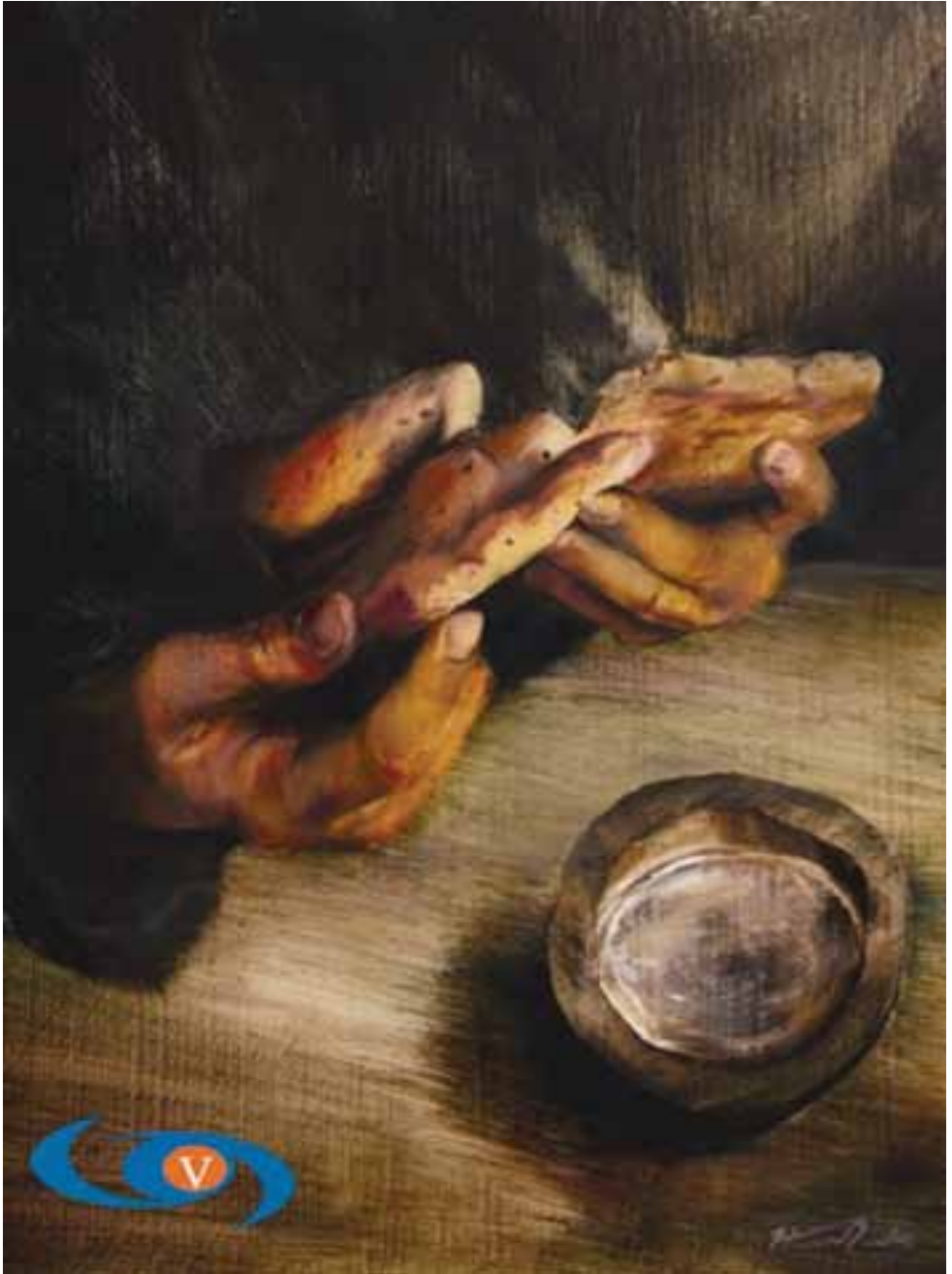
initial courting period, such *rooted attachment* leads to greater intimacy and with it, genuine love, expressed through care and compassion. None of this should surprise us. After all, having begun in a garden, the biblical narrative ends with a vision of a garden city where humanity and creation cohabit and the glory of God suffuses all.

This understanding of our Creator as originator and fulfiller of desire, the one who's constantly wooing us, inviting us to greater intimacy, love, attachment and peace, all the while remaining wholly Other beyond our comprehension or grasp, is beautifully captured in a passage by David Bentley Hart reflecting on the writing of Gregory of Nyssa:

God is to be understood first as τ ὑλιπistou κλλος, an unanticipated beauty, longed for but without certain hope, and so evoking desperation: a God 'seen' only by the infinite inflaming of desire, whose savor draws one on into ever greater dimensions of his glory, so that one is always at the beginning of one's pilgrimage toward him, always discovering and entering into greater dimensions of his beauty.... God is always beyond and still above the beyond, but also because God abides in absolute intimacy with creation as the infinite of surpassing fullness, whose beauty embraces and exceeds all that is.⁷

'Paradoxically and counter-culturally, it's arguably in a life of domesticity, attached to a specific place and particular people, that we truly become 'fully alive' as desiring and desired beings, open to the wooing of God.'

7 Hart, David Bentley. *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 186-187.



Broken for you by Howard Banks - www.veritasse.co.uk

The process of call

by Marg Schrader

I've been wooed by a few in my time, but none so exciting, so sensitive, so subtle, so attuned to who I am, as my God! I often go through life quite unaware of this persistent wooing, but when I stop and take note and abandon myself to this love – life changes.

This lover of mine (and yours) sends me gifts in so many ways. 'Hey! Look how much I love you,' as I stand in awe of the sunset. 'Hey! Listen to this, it's important,' as I unpack my dreams or wake up frightened with a nightmare. 'Hey! I care for you,' as my friend listens to me and holds me close.

Sometimes this wooing changes the outer structures of my life. Other times it has a profound effect on how I see myself and others, enabling me to sink ever more deeply into this love that will not let me go.

I was just turning five when my little friend said, 'If you come to my Sunday School on your birthday, they'll sit you in the birthday seat and give you a birthday cake and sing happy birthday to you.' What 5 year old would say 'No' to that?

I went – and they did all that. It didn't matter the birthday cake was made of plasticine, because I'd found a community of care. So I kept going almost every Sunday and later on to youth group. There I found the God who loves me so dearly.

Thirteen years later when Billy Graham came to town, I discovered Jesus really wanted to be my friend and I needed to give my life to him. So at Easter Camp I did just that. The experience changed everything and I saw everything was alive with the light of God.

About twenty years later, when the Charismatic movement was in full force, I was as resistant as you can be. But I was also aware people's lives were being changed radically. Finally I said to God, 'OK, I want you more than anything, so if that means I have to change my belief about gays and the way I view scripture then I choose you.'

Once again an amazing experience of the Holy Spirit's power transformed my ministry, and only caused me to deepen the very beliefs I thought I'd have to give up.

It was a very Trinitarian introduction to the amazing mystery of God.

My sense of mystery deepened when I discovered Spiritual Growth Ministries and its wonderful contemplative approach to life. Here I learned how to dance with the Trinity (*Perichoresis!*). The One who now for me is mystery and friend, comforter and guide, Mother and Father, womb and midwife.

As I look back on my life, I recognise God's been active in calling me into very different forms of ministry. These appeals have come in two ways. The most amazing were sudden and surprising, changing my sense of who I was and where my life was going. These were times when I just knew that I knew, that I knew: like sitting in a Summer

School happily expecting to continue Primary Teaching until the 'right man comes along'. All of a sudden I knew I had to offer to become a deaconess. A mere five weeks later I was in Deaconess College, without having to go through all the hoops everyone else did and having just the right time to give my school the four weeks' notice they required!

Similarly life changing was the call to marry Warren and his seven children, and move from OZ to NZ (his first wife died giving birth to the twins, then aged 2). People, including my poor mother, told me afterwards they tried to get me to look at how difficult this move might be – and I just kept changing the subject! Oh dear! Today, I'd be much more open to hearing my friends and family – who know me and love me.

Another call came to sell *The Still Point*, the house of prayer we'd set up in my home after Warren had died. The two nuns I worked with had both left to follow calls from their order. While sitting at an ACSD conference in Christchurch, I began to sob. I told my friend, 'I have to sell *The Still Point* and move to the beach.' Obediently I did. Ninety-five houses later, I found the perfect home.

Unlike these life-changing calls, most others are gentle and take more discernment – listening to dreams, scripture, the wisdom of friends, *and* that still small voice that speaks so often, as I walk the beach, do the garden or sit in Spiritual Direction.

Two other amazing examples of God's gentle wooing come to mind.

First, watching the second woman Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Margaret Reed Martin, leading Communion at our General Assembly. That still small voice I know so well whispered, 'You'll be doing that one day.' I consigned it immediately to that bin which says, 'Don't look, don't tell, and don't even think about it.' Warren was still alive and I didn't even tell *him*.

Five years later I'd been asked to lead worship at another Assembly and people from all around the church were coming up to me saying, 'You need to be our Moderator'. I hope I wasn't rude, but deep inside me I remembered that voice and I knew the time would be soon.

Second, was when I was on a thirty day retreat and felt Warren was going to die. I sobbed for about three days until my Spiritual Director said, 'We have no idea whether this is really about Warren's death or a metaphor of your life.' Even so, without saying anything to Warren, I began to take note when he sorted out the money and changed the washers and found myself being so much more attentive to his needs than I had been. Twelve months later when the doctor began to talk about him dying, I knew and I was prepared – I'd done so much preliminary grieving. It wasn't easy but I was so grateful to our loving God who prepared me for this. Warren was only 63.

As I write, I'm in the middle of a new call out of my life as Pastoral Minister with L'Arche, a community of people with and without intellectual disabilities. Let me share with you part of a letter to my friends there:

'The truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable'

This is a poster on my counselling room wall. It speaks profoundly to me at present along with the attached picture of Christ in the breadlines. I just recently had spiritual direction where I worked on a number of dreams from the past few months and a lot of deep feelings and intuitions that kept arising and surprising me. My dreams have been about houses being pulled down and living in the freedom of the open air, and needing to prune my passion fruit vine, and calling the police to get rid of all the people so I can be quiet and alone in an empty space, and an Ignatian prayer based on Matthew 7, about houses built on the sand and rock.

I discovered my house, firmly built on rock, now had leaks and lots of cracks, and the front door was off its hook. I found myself in a new place in the open air.

I've also been aware of being very tired; call it compassion fatigue, wanting space, getting angry and frustrated much more than normal. You have probably heard me say every now and again, 'I need to retire.' As I worked on this in spiritual direction, I wrote: **'There's a call on my life away from *busyness to stillness, upfrontness to hiddenness involvement with a lot of people to being more God centred.*'**

As I looked at the picture of the Christ in the breadlines I began to sob. I saw him as unseen, unknown, yet powerfully speaking of the hiddenness of God in human form.

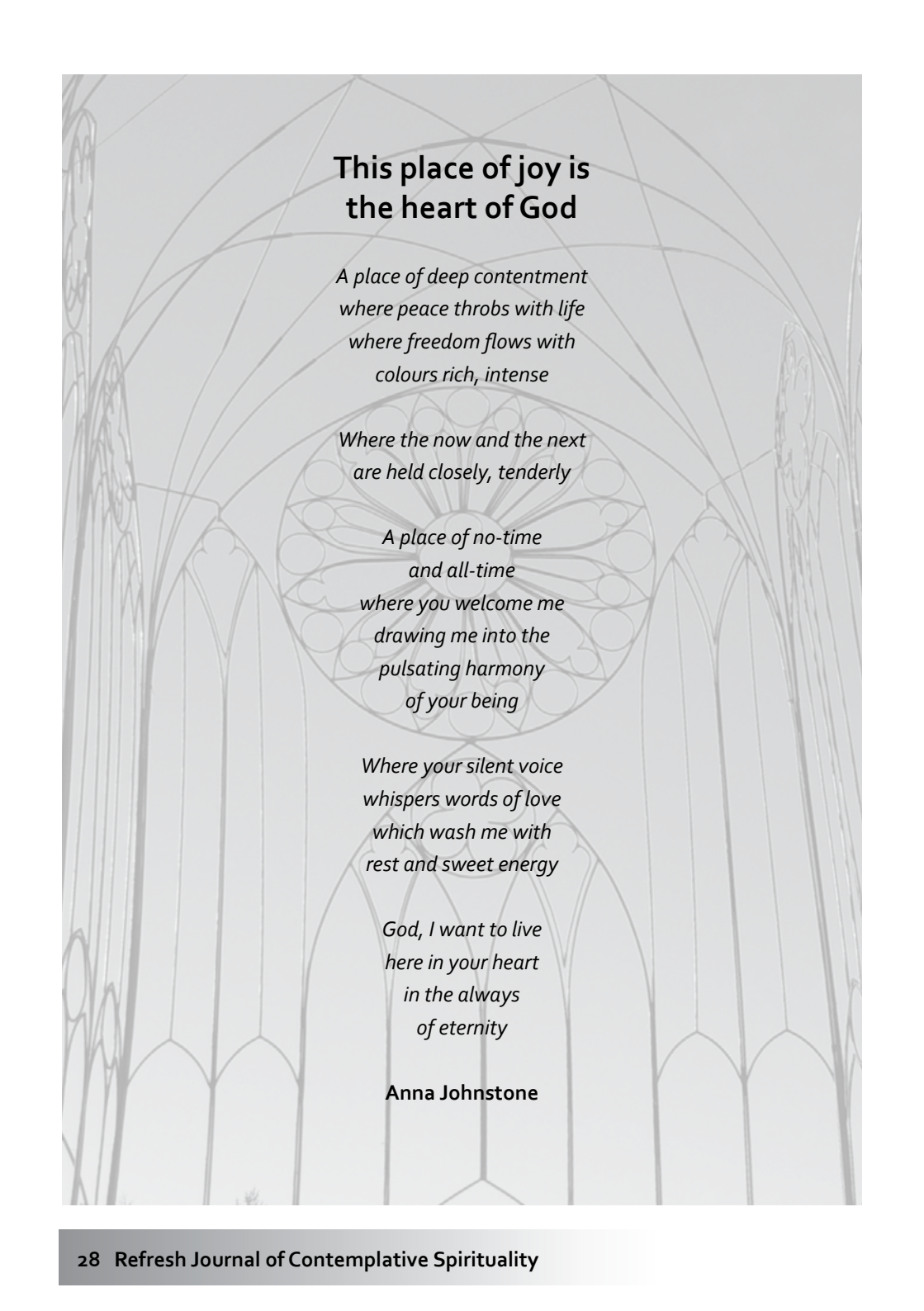
My life has been full of being up front. The call is to let go and I'm not sure what it will lead to – except to more stillness and more prayer. This has been working its way within me for a number of months, but now I have named it. The thing that amazes me is when I speak to people about this, they all say, 'You've been talking about this for a long while Marg. You need to do it.'

And so the process of call goes on. To where I don't know, but with whom I'm very sure. It's the one I know as Mother and Father, womb and midwife, friend and mysterious one, lover of the marginalised and prodger of me to action.

The one who knows me so well I can abandon myself, knowing I will be held. The one who comes to me disguised as my life.

Nan Merrill's *Psalms for Praying* Ps 119 reminds me to:
Be not afraid of love's touch,
the Fire that consumes all dross;
For love is the great transformer.
Burning away false ways of the past, and
filling the heart with Light.
Awaken to the Indwelling presence of the Beloved !
Envision the beauty that love brings forth!¹

1 Nan C Merrill, *Psalms for praying*, Continuum 2006; p. 264.



**This place of joy is
the heart of God**

*A place of deep contentment
where peace throbs with life
where freedom flows with
colours rich, intense*

*Where the now and the next
are held closely, tenderly*

*A place of no-time
and all-time
where you welcome me
drawing me into the
pulsating harmony
of your being*

*Where your silent voice
whispers words of love
which wash me with
rest and sweet energy*

*God, I want to live
here in your heart
in the always
of eternity*

Anna Johnstone

Protestant Barriers to Contemplative Prayer

by J. David Muyskens

As a minister in the reformed tradition, I'm well acquainted with the resistance some Protestants have toward contemplation. Here are some typical objections and how they might be overcome.

'We consider contemplative prayer to be an Eastern practice.'

Contemplative prayer has always been part of the Christian tradition, but since the 16th Century churches gave up teaching the practice to ordinary people. Many thought quiet, silent prayer was the sole province of Eastern religions. In the 1970s three US monks, Thomas Keating, William Meninger and Basil Pennington developed guidelines for teaching a way of prayer that could open a person to receive the gift of contemplation modelled on the 14th Century classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

'It's a Catholic practice.'

Thank God this prejudice is declining. But misunderstanding between Protestants and Catholics still lingers. Catholic communities of men and women are more inclined to be contemplative. As a result some Protestants associate contemplation with Catholicism. But today, many Protestants are discovering the value of spending time in silence with God. They appreciate having their relationship with God strengthened by contemplative prayer.

'Contemplative Prayer isn't taught in Protestant Churches.'

We tend to be suspicious of anything different. This protects us from heretical ideas and destructive practices. But it also can cut us off from fountains of living water. We may miss the contemplative dimension of the Christian tradition. As it is restored to Protestant devotional practice, we discover the rich communion with God that's made possible by the work of the Spirit. We need to take time for silence.

'We tend to be suspicious of anything different. This protects us from heretical ideas and destructive practices. But it also can cut us off from fountains of living water.'

'Prayer is talking to God.'

A friend of mine who has little time for silent prayer says, "If you have something to say to God just say it." He considers prayer to be entirely a matter of petitions. But if prayer is a conversation then there has to be more than our talking. We also need to listen. We need time to commune with God, to be aware of God's presence and consent to God's action in us. It's the same with any of our relationships, when we're most intimate with someone, we sometimes spend time together without words. Prayer, as relationship

with God, includes at least three dimensions: listening, talking and being together.

'We use our minds to know truth.'

Our creeds are intellectual statements. In belief, we primarily think of propositions of doctrine. Feelings are suspect because they can be fickle. But faith engulfs the whole person from the very core of our being including the heart as well as the mind. The whole person can be in silent and deep communion with God.

'We think a lot about the past and the future.'

We're often mulling over what happened in the past or planning what comes next. So we miss the present moment. But the past is gone and the future isn't here yet. We have to experience the gifts of God in the present moment. In contemplation we live right now. In Centering Prayer we let go of thoughts of the past and anticipation of the future. We take time to be in the moment with the presence of God and open to the immediate action of God. In contemplative prayer we celebrate the present, right now.

'We want answers.'

For our many questions we want clear answers. Large churches are filled with people who desire certitude. Most often preachers in these churches appear to have the answers. But the Bible talks about mystery. God is beyond our comprehension. The revelation Paul received, mentioned in Ephesians 3, is the mystery hidden for ages. This isn't mystery as in a puzzle to be solved, but mystery beyond human knowledge which can only be seen by the light given by the Holy Spirit. In contemplative prayer we stand amazed at the love of God not fully understood but known and experienced in the Spirit.

'We fear contemplation is an occult practice.'

When we go to the place of silence and solitude, we fear we will meet the devil there. But actually, in contemplative prayer, we go to the most sacred sanctuary of Christ. We go to the inner sanctum where Christ dwells with great power and majesty. No force contrary to Christ can enter there because Christ's power and glory will expel it. We enter with Christ a fortress of inner strength.

'We worship a far-away God.'

We worship the all-powerful One, high and lifted up, worthy of our praise. But God is also near to us, dwelling within us. As Jesus said, we are in him and he in us. God is both transcendent and immanent at the same time. Aware that God dwells in us and invites us to an intimate relationship, we become contemplatives. One of the great leaders of Protestantism, John Calvin, described the position of prayer as being held in the 'bosom' of God (Institutes III, 20, 5). He described the intimate relationship we can have with God as being in the 'sweetness of love' (Institutes III, 20... 28).

'We are sinners.'

Of course, we have all sinned. And we need to recognise that. We depend on the grace

of Christ to free us from our sin and transform us into the people God wants us to be. We are sinners saved by grace. If we have read Martin Luther we know that we can be both sinners and saints at the same time. 'Total depravity' does not mean there is nothing good in us. It means that in every aspect of human life, sin has messed us up. But God still loves us and desires an intimate relationship with us. We are created in the image and likeness of God.

'Contemplation is not mentioned in the Bible.'

Yet the Bible does talk about Moses and Elijah and Jesus going to secluded places to spend time with God. The Bible speaks frequently about the 'heart.' That doesn't mean the organ that pumps blood, it means the core of our being. From the emotional, spiritual and physical centre of our being we can love God and enter into a deep communion with the divine.

'Scripture is our authority.'

We rely on the words of the Bible for truth and guidance. If we listen to the whole of scripture, it teaches contemplative prayer. Psalm 46 says, 'Be still and know that I am God.' Christ dwells in us (Jn 15:4). We take note that Jesus talked about our being 'in' Him and he 'in' us. Scripture teaches the indwelling presence of God. Contemplative prayer is a way to consent to God's presence and the work in us.

'We tend to be active, not passive.'

We trust in God's activity. We believe God is always at work. It may seem that our response should also be active. We value obedience as a mark of a true Christian. But sometimes we need to be receptive, listen, and enter deeply in communion. Activity is important, but humans require rest and restoration as well. So recovery of the contemplative dimension can be healing. We can adopt new habits, as they are beneficial.

'We're not good at talking about spiritual experiences.'

If we do have deep experiences of the presence of God, we may not talk about it. Everyone has contemplative moments. In a confrontation with beauty or a dazzling insight, we can experience the closeness of God. But we may not share that with anyone else. Yes, some of us have traditions of public testimony. But even these can be like pre-recorded messages and not very revelatory. In contemplative prayer, we make a regular practice of openness to the reality of God. In sharing contemplative moments, we can inspire each other.

'We go to the inner sanctum where Christ dwells with great power and majesty. No force contrary to Christ can enter there because Christ's power and glory will expel it.'

'We spend time with God in church, but seldom in other places.'

There are times when we're especially aware of God. But often we try to manage things ourselves. We can go about our daily living without being conscious of God. Yet, at every moment we depend on the gifts of God. The gift of life itself means divine energy is flowing through us.

In contemplative prayer, we're aware of the Spirit of God. In contemplative living, we pay attention to the presence and action of God in every moment. So we become more conscious of God in everyday life, in nature, in events, in people. The awareness of God that is given to us in prayer becomes a way of life. Our consciousness of God grows as Christ transforms us from within.

Conclusion

I have listed some of the reasons Protestants resist contemplative prayer. Some are important to me, you have to decide if there are some important to you. We can pray and think about them. We may be preventing ourselves from enjoying the contemplative dimension of prayer and life.

If you're trying to interest Protestants in contemplation, I recommend David's book *Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God: The Practice of Centering Prayer*, Upper Room Books, 2007. ED.



Covered with Grace by Cindy Norris - www.veritasse.co.uk

Attraction and resistance in life with God

by John O'Connor

In every moment, any human is motivated by attraction, or by resistance. Those who are novices in life's journey simply flow with attraction and act against whatever they consider to be distasteful.

The prisoner of this behaviour lives compulsively by the motto: 'if it feels good, do it; if it feels bad, avoid it.'

feelings

We ignore our feelings at our peril. However, the feelings that are uppermost in the human consciousness are simply a starting point for discernment. Feelings are the raw material with which we discern movement towards or away from God. At this conscious level it may be that God is calling me to do what feels difficult, perhaps painful, at least on the 'skin' of my heart. It may be instead that the evil spirit is shrewdly enticing me to evil by attracting me to something that feels good.

the subtle tempter

As Ignatius highlights in his rules for discernment, the evil spirit can be a subtle tempter. If I am only beginning a life of faith, the evil one does not have to try too hard to derail my efforts and confuse my desires. But as one becomes more aware of the subtleties and intimacies of life with God, the technique of the evil spirit also becomes more refined.

As we practise the presence of God, we begin to see with the eyes of the heart. Now we see false advertising for what it is: so much of what the world offers, fails to deliver what it promises. At this 'wake-up' moment, we begin to grow in awareness. We notice that when we follow our deepest desire, we're never disappointed. What appears to be the 'hard road' can pave the path to joy beyond my imagining.

I begin to realise my feelings, at first glance, appear to impel me towards what promises everything, yet fails to deliver. This is a painful and wonderful moment of awakening. I begin to ask questions that lead me beyond my previous limited existence. 'There must be more to life?' 'What do I really want from life?' 'What am I created for?'

impulses and feelings

A difficulty can be that most people equate feelings with impulses. An animal responds instinctively and cannot 'feel' in a human sense. An animal behaves impulsively. An animal can't savour the life of the heart. This life of the Spirit of God is reserved for humans.

Human happiness can never be found by instinctively satisfying our animal instincts and impulses. The human heart is created for much more. As St. Augustine proclaims: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".

At the deepest level of the human heart, our longing and desire is for God, and for all that God offers us. This unfulfilled desire is an intrinsic part of the human condition. It is not a flaw. Longing is the characteristic of the human heart. This desire is planted in us by God, to direct us to the purpose of our human existence, that is, life with God.

orientation to God: the fruit of true desire

Our deepest desire is our personal compass. This compass is a divine gift. It is our heart-experienced desire that orients us to God. Understanding this desire is the key to human purpose and happiness. I might think my desire is for money, food, possessions, for sex or even for good wine. These gifts of God are all good in their time and place. But none of these gifts, (or even all of them together on a 'busy' evening) can deliver the satisfaction they seem to promise. At the surface, our impulses (often the only motivations in our consciousness) are formed by fashion and fear. Most often these urges are little more than the product of our culture and upbringing.

delayed pleasure – a step on the path of maturity

A healthy child learns that it is not a bad thing to delay pleasure. The cake looks attractive. But it will taste even better if I spend (at least a few moments) looking forward to eating it. The anticipation has a pleasure all of its own. Then fear kicks in. If I don't eat the cake now, perhaps someone else will grab it and I'll miss out?

As the child grows, she also learns the pleasure of sharing. I don't need to eat all the cake to be happy. I give some of the cake to my friend. Now I have some cake, and my relationship with my friend is also strengthened. Then I realise that, at its best, the cake can bring happiness only momentarily. While I feel attraction to the cake, and I want to eat it, this is not my deepest desire. There is something else at work. I realise that I am being held in the loving embrace of the one who will see that 'I have the cake, and eat it too.'

My greatest maturity is reached when I seek opportunities to give all I have and possess, to another. In this decision of the will my superficial feelings are transcended and I relax in the embrace of Jesus. When I leave this embrace, and grasp at whatever appears to offer satisfaction, I am left feeling empty and lonely. When I relax into the embrace and provision of the one who loves me more than I could ever dream, then I experience all that I have ever desired.

'Our deepest desire is our personal compass. This compass is a divine gift. It is our heart-experienced desire that orients us to God.'

the tension of the human condition

To be caught in the tension between attraction and resistance, is a mark of the 'fallen' human condition. Most of the time, we don't think about this. We simply move through the day responding to the demands we experience. We like to do what attracts us and avoid what we don't like.

the forces of love or of fear

But take a moment to think about it: in every moment, I am motivated by attraction or resistance. Let's put it another way. The forces of both love and fear (which is the opposite of love) are acting upon me in every moment. So what am I to do? Is every decision I take to be determined by these inevitable forces? Faced with the strength of such pressures, what freedom do I really have?

Well, for a start I need to acknowledge that my idea of what constitutes both love and fear is severely distorted. At times I fear love. In other moments I seem to hold on to the motivation of fear. I can be uncontrollably motivated by the fear of failure and vulnerability.

There are times when I resist love. In other moments I am trapped by resistance. In these moments, thoughts of anger and revenge flood my consciousness.

In the midst of this human condition, what does it mean for me to be a disciple of Jesus? This is where the good news meets our human experience. Yes, we do live with these tensions, but Christ offers us another way. He offers us a freedom that transforms and transcends the snares of sin. If I seek to follow Christ, I am choosing not to be slave to fears and fashion. Neither am I opting to follow a path of moral guidelines and religious practices. This is a commonly held, and ultimately fatal misunderstanding of the Christian life.

In choosing Christ, I am seeking to live in relationship with Jesus. Like the first disciples, we choose to follow an attraction. No doubt fears floated in the minds of Andrew and John. But they had encountered the ultimate relationship. They felt at home in the loving gaze of Jesus. They had found the relationship that they had spent their lives seeking. And when he said, "Come and see", they could not resist.

the art of spiritual direction

And this is the heart of human existence. Too often when we say we're accompanying pilgrims on their journey of faith, we're doing little but supporting their superficial attractions and fears. This happens when we seek nothing more for ourselves than the gratification of our own compulsions.

A spiritual director is one who themselves has a greater attraction to the objective reality of the life of God (as reflected in the life of the directee), than to the

establishment and maintenance of a positive relationship with the directee. By the grace of God there won't be a tension, since the pilgrim will (ideally) also be aware of their own deepest desire for God. By God's grace, the directee will be grateful for the critical encouragement of a spiritual companion.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.
St. Ignatius of Loyola

**'My greatest maturity is
reached when I seek
opportunities to give
all I have and possess,
to another.'**

Your love is different, Jesus

*My love is straight lines
squares and rectangles*

*Yours is flowing, sweeping
no sharp corners
no tight bends*

*Mine scrapes the bottom
of the barrel sometimes*

*Yours overflows like
the waters of Niagara*

*Mine is often mud-coloured
while yours wraps me
in rainbows*

*Mine is lots of short sentences
full stops and question marks*

*Yours is a symphony whose
music sings in my spirit
and draws me
to dance*

Anna Johnstone



Home by Anna Johnstone

Expanding Horizons of Spiritual Direction in the 21st Century

Adapted from keynote address

Spiritual Directors' Refresher Day Auckland 12/2/11

Sheila Pritchard

I agree with Richard Rohr when he says: "...It becomes so clear to me as I grow older that people who change, and keep changing, are the only people who grow..."¹ The pace of change is constantly accelerating. Every generation has exponentially more to process and keep up with than the one before.

'Growing up' includes an expanding faith journey. Some years ago I began to think of my journey as a series of concentric circles. The first was an evangelical Baptist circle. Of course, over the years there were many expansions to that first circle: charismatic experience, a Catholic spiritual director, working in another culture, teaching in an interdenominational mission school, training as a spiritual director in a Jesuit retreat centre, valuing the richness of other faiths... The circles kept expanding. Over and over again the circle I lived in became too small for the God I was coming to know.

Then I came across the phrase, '**Include and transcend**' in Ken Wilber's book *Integral Spirituality*². That expressed it perfectly. That's what I had instinctively been doing – *including* the rich value of each 'circle' but *transcending* its limits to welcome more and more of what was revealed.

Think about Jesus: He both included and transcended Judaism. He said he had not come to negate the law but to fulfil it.³ With hindsight, we accept that quite easily. But at the time, his demonstration of what that meant was shocking. He apparently 'broke' many of the laws the Jews held as sacrosanct – particularly Sabbath observance and the welcoming of those deemed 'unclean'. He went out of his way to interact warmly with women, with Samaritans, to eat with those others despised and to say a Roman centurion had more faith than his own Jewish community.⁴

In the end, of course, Jesus was murdered for his insistence on expanding the horizons of how people saw God. 'Include and transcend' was a threat to those who wanted to stay within the familiar horizon of Judaism.

Then there is the apostle Paul (first known as Saul). Saul was deeply committed to maintaining the purity of Judaism as a tightly defined circle. He was willing to fight, torture and kill to do away with the 'enemy' outside the circle. We see the same thing played out today by people who fight to defend what they see as the 'fundamentals' of their particular faith tradition.

1 Quoted on Prodigal Kiwi Blog Feb7 2011 <http://prodigal.typepad.com/>

2 Integral Spirituality Ken Wilber (Integral Books, 2006)

3 Matthew 5:17

4 Matthew 8:5-11

However, in a mystical experience where God met him directly, Saul/ Paul's eyes were opened to see that the 'Jesus horizon' was one to step into and embrace. Jesus opened up for Paul a whole new way of seeing the world and the God who loves and includes every part of it.

A few years later, Paul was able to write that: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁵ Probably we don't realise what a radical and startling statement that was. We've become used to it. But what if a currently respected leader were to say: "These 'us and them' categories no longer apply: Christian and non-Christian, citizen and refugee, gay and straight, because we are all equally embraced by God's love"? I'm guessing we have a more visceral reaction now! We find it hard to recognise our own boundaries until someone asks us to transcend them. In both Jesus and Paul we have examples of what it means to include the tradition that has formed us and yet to transcend it.

'...we thirst for answers to questions that have haunted humanity from the very beginning.'

So what might all this mean for us today as disciples willing to 'grow up' into our 21st Century journey?

We need to recognise that we live at a crucial point in the history of the universe. We have choices to make.

Ecology: We can't go on depleting the earth as if it were a store cupboard of endless resources for our use, misuse and disposal.

We are intimately related to the life and generous beauty of the earth. If it dies, we die too. Hardin Tibbs, who calls himself an 'eco-spiritual futurist', says: "As I see it ecological sustainability is really the platform for the next stage of cultural evolution in which the entire culture begins to move into higher realms of **spiritual development**, self-discovery."⁶ (emphasis added)

Technology: Another key factor of our place in history is the exponential growth of technology and communication systems. Today we can access from our desk things that would have been completely out of reach just a few years ago. Part of my current expanding circle is due to websites, free on-line seminars and access to the great exponents of science, spirituality and evolutionary Christianity.⁷ I'm also able to join with millions of other people campaigning for justice⁸, contributing

5 Galatians 3:28

6 From interview in <http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j47/>

7 e.g. www.evolutionarychristianity.com

8 www.avaaz.org

food for the hungry, saving forests, supplying books to children and healthcare to women.⁹

There is no excuse for saying either “I don’t have the resources” or “I can’t do anything useful.”

Science: Brian Swimme¹⁰, who spoke at the *Spiritual Directors International*¹¹ conference I attended in 2007, is just one of numerous people from many scientific fields who is linking the sciences and spirituality in ways I find very exciting.

“Today we know what no previous generation knew: the history of the universe and of the unfolding of life on Earth. Through the astonishing combined achievements of natural scientists worldwide, we now have a detailed account of how galaxies and stars, planets and living organisms, human beings and human consciousness came to be. And yet . . . we thirst for answers to questions that have haunted humanity from the very beginning. What is our place in the 14-billion-year history of the universe? What roles do we play in Earth’s history? How do we connect with the intricate web of life on Earth?”¹²

In light of all this while we gratefully **include** the wisdom of past generations we must also **transcend** the limits of each previous era’s capacity to grasp and express what they experienced.

The Biblical writers thought that the earth was flat. The world of the first century couldn’t comprehend or speak about nuclear warfare, stem cell research, global warming or space travel. Even the world of the early 20th Century couldn’t be in awe of the God of trillions of galaxies or the possibilities inherent in the World Wide Web. As we reflect on the ever-expanding horizons of God’s revelation, we can’t afford to give Sunday School answers to 21st Century questions.¹³

In an interview, Father Thomas Keating said that at times the death of old ways of seeing things may be part of an extreme dark night of the soul. “It can feel like becoming an atheist. But what is dying is an unreal view of God so in the end it is a helpful place to be.”¹⁴

My experience is that things being discovered and expressed in 21st Century language shed light on what Jesus and/or the mystics of earlier centuries have been saying all along. As TS Eliot said:

9 www.thehungersite.com

10 www.brianswimme.org

11 <http://www.sdiworld.org/>

12 From the introduction to a new book (and film) by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker *Journey of the Universe*. For a trailer of the film see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVwkDISDYHE>

13 Useful resource: *A New Kind of Christianity*:

Ten questions that are transforming the faith Brian McLaren (HarperOne 2010)

14 <http://integrallife.com/contributors/father-thomas-keating>

With the drawing of this Love
and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.¹⁵

Consider Jesus words: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."¹⁶ Or Paul's prayer "- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."¹⁷ Do we take these as nice ideas that really have no practical meaning? Or do we respond with a trembling willingness to let our horizon be stretched beyond any bounds we can imagine, to share in the continuing revelation of God? TS Eliot goes on to say, this requires "a condition of complete simplicity – costing not less than everything."

The 21st Century is a time of quantum challenges and quantum possibilities. People within and outside the church are searching for spiritual companions or communities who will give them a safe place to explore more deeply and honestly. Let's commit to doing whatever it takes to expand our own horizons so we can accompany others into the all-encompassing love of a God who transcends all boundaries.

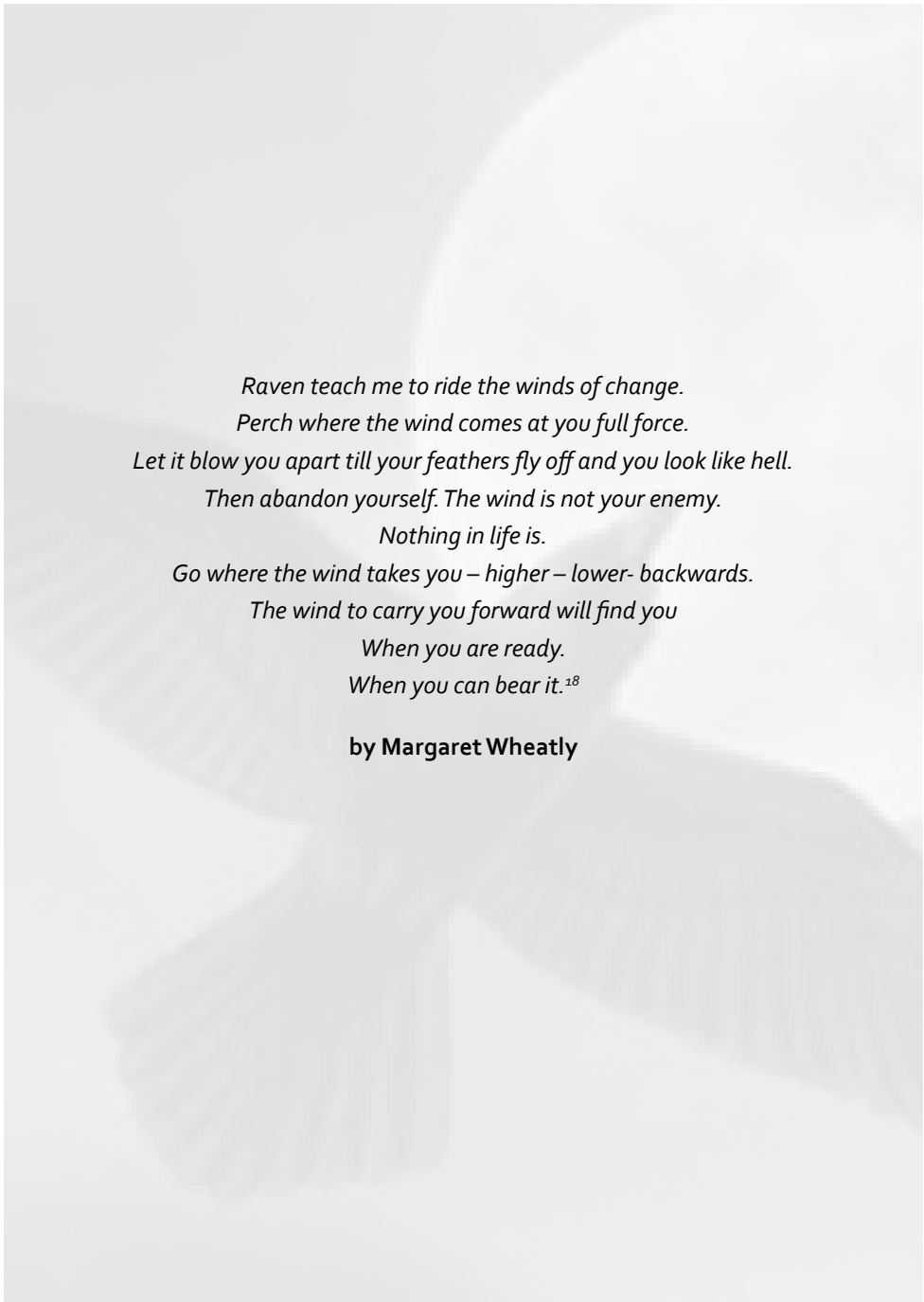
**'We need to recognise that we
live at a crucial point in
the history of the universe.
We have choices to make.'**

15 From Little Gidding TS Eliot

16 John 14:12

17 Ephesians 3:19

18 <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/>



*Raven teach me to ride the winds of change.
Perch where the wind comes at you full force.
Let it blow you apart till your feathers fly off and you look like hell.
Then abandon yourself. The wind is not your enemy.
Nothing in life is.
Go where the wind takes you – higher – lower- backwards.
The wind to carry you forward will find you
When you are ready.
When you can bear it.³⁸*

by Margaret Wheatly

SGM News Summer 2012

It's usually spring when I'm writing this news column for the summer edition of *Refresh*. This year I'm even more attuned to the significance of changing seasons because of Alexander Shaia's wonderful reflections at the ACSD conference based on the Gospels: Matthew-Autumn, Mark-Winter, John-Spring, Luke-Summer. (see Adrienne Thompson's report in this edition) As I reflect on the life and ministry of SGM in this last year and ponder likely developments in the months ahead, aspects of all four seasons are apparent – change, loss, greening, and perseverance.

We celebrate the resumed publication of *Refresh* with great joy! We look forward to your comment and feedback. Leaving a fallow year between the last issue and this one allowed Diane's appointment as editor to be discerned well and provided good gestation time for her first edition. We look forward to many more! At our September Workgroup meeting, themes for future editions emerged readily and inspiration flowed!

Also at the meeting, Warren Deason, a valued member of Workgroup since September 2001, announced his decision to stand down. During sabbatical and study leave earlier this year, Warren recognised changes in areas to which he particularly contributed: fewer opportunities for Wilderness and Film retreats and the windup of the Auckland-based editorial group for *Refresh*. We accepted Warren's decision with sadness and great gratitude for his contribution to SGM and were delighted at his promise to remain committed to our work and its ministry. We'll miss Warren's movie recommendations at Workgroup, but console ourselves that there are several movie buffs staying on!

'The clear mission to which SGM is called and to which we are enthusiastically committed is to support and resource people in Christian contemplative spiritual growth'

Also this year, Carole Hunt signalled that she saw the end approaching of her time as SGM Administrator. She needs more free time to enjoy retirement and her extended family. Carole began as administrator in 1996 and has contributed greatly to the smooth functioning of SGM ever since. In typically generous and supportive spirit, Carole will continue in the role into 2012. This will allow us time to review the administrator's role and the administrative needs of the Formation Programme and to provide for these in the best way possible. Carole's contribution to SGM has been immense – more will be said when her well-earned retirement is realised!

In my letter to the SGM 'Family' in March, I indicated we were setting aside an additional day at September Workgroup specifically for reflection, discussion and prayer to re-focus our vision for the future. Thank you to those of you who responded with reflections, feedback and suggestions. We're very grateful to John McAlpine who facilitated this

significant day for us with grace and wisdom. There will be much to develop as we review our notes from the day in the months ahead.

At this early stage several things stand out:

- the clear mission to which SGM is called and to which we are enthusiastically committed is to support and resource people in Christian contemplative spiritual growth remains
- current programmes and events are consistent with that mission
- emerging priorities include:
 - a greater focus on follow-up of those who complete the spiritual directors' formation programme and on professional development opportunities for experienced directors. We envisage the appointment of a self-supporting person to develop this area in consultation with Workgroup.
 - better support for people in church, chaplaincy and other ministries, resourcing them for ministry that is healthy, sustainable and fruitful.
 - as resources of people, time and finance allow, to update and expand SGM's online presence through the web and social networking.

All of these require increased expenditure at a time when the economy is stagnant or contracting. Faith and generosity will be required. Perhaps more than ever, we covet your prayers, and if you are able, a generous response to the Friends of SGM appeal enclosed.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Pritchard

Convenor

Book Review by Trish Harris

Tree of a Thousand Voices Poems by Anne Powell

Published by Steele Roberts Publishers 71 pp

Available in bookshops and direct from the Cenacle

Email: clare@cenacle.org.nz \$20 + pp

This new collection by Anne Powell was awarded second place in the highly competitive national Ashton Wylie Charitable Trust Book Awards. It expands themes from her previous two books. Here again is Anne's attention to the physical world and her skill in capturing the inner life of the spirit.

I love Anne's sparse but clear language, her playfulness and skill in turning an image on its head: 'Love, like a high king tide/ knocked us off our feet/grown too accustomed to shoes'. There are invitations too – not only to care for our spirit: 'Inside who you are/is a tree in its rightful season./If only you'd....' but also the land. There are calls to take risks, to come up against uncomfortable edges: 'Does a moth circle the candle in fireproof wings?' And poems that talk of chaos, violence and Alzheimer's, poems that don't shirk from hard reality and still manage to convey a sense of being held by something bigger.

As a bonus there are four short prose pieces – small stories from Anne's journal. Again the language is pared back and evocative.

At the launch last year, Anne spoke of her hope for the poems as alternatives to noise and clutter, to violence, to the status quo and to isolation. She reminded us: "Dominican, Timothy Radcliffe wrote: 'Poetry can offer a doorway into the Divine'. I hope these poems become a doorway into the restoring power of silence, as a way of peace-making, of questioning and dreaming into what might be, and as a doorway into loving comm-union."

These poems could be used in many settings – in retreats and spiritual direction. They're accessible to people from a wide range of spiritual backgrounds. I've also been dipping into them on my way to bed, as a way to close the day. As happens with poetry, the more I've read, the deeper the words have gone.



Film Review Of Gods and Men

reviewer Andrew Dunn

Directed by Xavier Beauvois, written by
Beauvois and Etienne Coma. 122 minutes.

French with English subtitles. Produced September 2010.

A powerful film based around the disappearance of a group of Trappist monks in Algeria in 1996. It has won various awards and acclaim including the Best Foreign Language Film and the Cannes Grand Prize in 2010.

For many years, the Trappists had been working in an impoverished rural area and village. With the onset of the Algerian civil war, they must decide whether to stay to continue their work and witness, or return to France and to safety. This becomes the central issue throughout the film, unfolding slowly as each man faces the challenge to stay and serve or leave and abandon the people who depend on them for medicine and support. As one villager tells them, "You are the branch of the tree and we are the birds perching there. If you go what happens to us?"

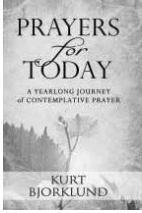
Of Gods and Men is a most profound and contemplative movie exploring the call to service in Christ's name. It is presented with the emotive power of men who must decide to follow their Lord come what may.

In pace and mood I was reminded of *Into Deep Silence*, and for the edginess of the call to face the cost of discipleship, the Canadian film *I Heard The Owl Call My Name*. The Last Supper scene as they prepare themselves for the uncertain future, sipping wine and listening to the overture from Swan Lake, is gripping.

Excellent film making. Grand scenery (filmed in neighbouring Morocco). Deeply moving. A serious challenge towards costly discipleship in this era of ease and security.



Resources



Prayers for Today: A Yearlong Journey of Contemplative Prayer
by Kurt Bjorklund

Paperback: 272 pages
Publisher: Moody Publishers (October 1, 2011)
ISBN-10: 0802463509



The First Sight by Laurence Freeman (Sep 1, 2011)

Paperback: 168 pages
Publisher: Continuum (September 1, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1441161570
ISBN-13: 978-1441161574



Pillar of Prayer: Guidance in Contemplative Prayer, Sacred Study, and the Spiritual Life, from the Baal Shem Tov and His Circle
by Aubrey L. Glazer and Menachem Kallus (Sep 1, 2011)

Paperback: 120 pages
Publisher: Fons Vitae (September 1, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1891785796
ISBN-13: 978-1891785795



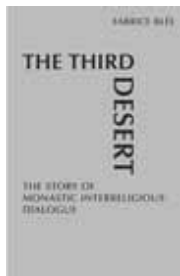
Lectio Divina--The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-centered Prayer
by Christine Valters Paintner
(May 27, 2011)

Paperback: 192 pages
Publisher: Skylight Paths Pub (May 27, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1594733007
ISBN-13: 978-1594733000



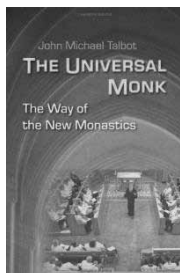
Nature as Spiritual Practice by Steven Chase (May 17, 2011)

Paperback: 296 pages
Publisher: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (May 17, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0802840108
ISBN-13: 978-0802840103



The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (Spanish Edition) by Fabrice Blée (Apr 7, 2011)

Paperback: 236 pages
Publisher: Liturgical Press (April 7, 2011)
Language: Spanish
ISBN-10: 0814633579
ISBN-13: 978-0814633571



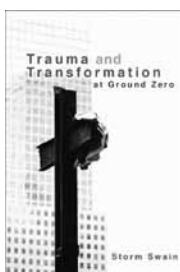
The Universal Monk: The Way of the New Monastics by John Michael Talbot (Mar 5, 2011)

Paperback: 230 pages
Publisher: Liturgical Press (March 5, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0814633412
ISBN-13: 978-0814633410



Magnitude 7.1 & 6.3

Early September 4, 2010, a series of seismic events began to unfold in Christchurch. They would eventually take 182 lives and directly affect hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. Magnitude 7.1 & 6.3 is a compilation of stories from pre-schoolers, teenagers, families, and retirees about the impact of the on-going quakes and aftershocks, the emotional and physical toll they exacted, and their hope for a new city. They reflect the incredible resilience the people of Canterbury. Some are poignant, some humorous, some shocking and some sad. All are from the heart and deserve to be heard. The book is printed in Christchurch – supporting local business. To purchase contact Debbie Rooome – experienced freelance writer/novelist/photographer roomees@slingshot.co.nz NZ\$20.00



Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero. Storm Swain. 203pp. Fortress. \$42.00.

“A stunning book! Part ethnography, part practical theology, Swain has offered a moving and powerfully written reflection on the soul-wrenching work of chaplaincy in the midst of disaster and in the aftermath of great evil, and on the challenges to those who minister at the extreme edges of shock and grief. Drawing from the New Zealand Prayerbook, she has developed a trinitarian theology for pastoral care that not only undergirds responses to trauma, but offers a foundation for all pastoral care. A profound ‘must-read’ for all who minister and all who offer care.” Rev Pamela Cooper-White, Columbia Theological Seminar

Contributors

Peter Stuart is a 'retired' Anglican priest living in Eastbourne, Wellington. He is National Coordinator of the Cistercian Lay Associate Community linked with Southern Star Abbey, Kopua. Amongst other roles he is a spiritual director and ministry supervisor. peterstuart@clear.net.nz

Anna Johnstone enjoys living on Auckland's North Shore with her writer/photographer husband, exploring new paths of creativity, trying out new recipes and learning to play the clarinet. www.johnstone2.co.nz

Anna and her husband Kerry are part of the editorial team for Refresh for which the editor is hugely grateful!

Joy Cowley is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and child of God.

Andrew Shepherd works as a freelance teacher/researcher in areas of theology, missiology, ethics and environmental studies. He is involved in different capacities with various Christian movements, including Servants to Asia's Urban Poor and A Rocha. He is attached to his wife, Ingrid and three young daughters and 'makes home' in the small community of Makarora in Western Otago.

Marg Schrader enjoys living close to the beach on the Kapiti Coast in semi-retirement. She has an ever expanding family. Last year a young man in the process of his dying asked if she'd be his grandmother and his sister said, "Me too please". That makes 16 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren – all step but one! So life is full.

John O'Connor is a priest of the Catholic diocese of Christchurch. He is the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Victories, Sockburn, St Joseph's Darfield, and St Therese of Lisieux, Chatham Islands. He is a spiritual director who leads retreat and seminars on spiritual formation.

Deborah Bower is Interim Minister at Wakatipu Community Church in Queenstown. She holds a PhD in Theology from Otago University. When she is not working, you will no doubt find her enjoying a fantastic coffee in one of the many amazing cafes in the Wakatipu basin.

Robert Grant has worked post-quake in three countries and is experienced in other forms of trauma work. He's a consultant and trainer to business, religious, medical, psychological, military, law enforcement, relief and missionary organisations. Since 1996, he's assessed/treated over 1000 victims of trauma and trained over 10,000 professionals around the world to work with victims of trauma. rw_grant@hotmail.com

Andrew Pritchard husband of 1, father of 3, grandfather of 1, loves God and life! Teaching, spiritual direction, supervision and administration fill my working days. Reading, listening to music, walking, playing golf and pottering in my shed are vital for my physical, mental and spiritual health!

Adrienne Thompson - Having spent much of her life in Asia, Adrienne now lives with her husband and an ever-changing number of flatmates in Wellington. She wrestles with her love of solitude and her call to community and her spiritual direction practice grows out of both.

Sheila Pritchard - Sheila lives on the North Shore in Auckland and enjoys a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats. More of her writing can be accessed from her Blog: <http://sheilapritchard.blogspot.com/>

David Muyskens is an ordained minister in the reformed tradition and a practitioner of contemplative prayer who writes extensively for a protestant audience. *Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God: The Practice of Centering Prayer*, Upper Room Books, 2007

Trish Harris lives in Porirua city where she writes, 'aunts', operates a crane and works with people who are interested in spirituality. She also has a small business called Ribbonwood Designs. She loves being involved in all of these things.

Andrew Dunn enjoys living in Albany's bush at Oasis Retreat Centre and working there on retreats, in spiritual direction, supervision, and writing family histories. He is the former Editor of Refresh.

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Cover photo Sculpture Cathedra Domine (Throne of God) by Rose Petterson - DGW

p2 Song of Solomon by Dr. He Qi www.heqigallery.com;

p9 Pour over me by Sue Newham;

p18 Broken for you by Howard Banks,

p22 Covered With Grace by Cindy Norris all from Veritasse <http://www.veritasse.co.uk/>

p27 Home by Anna Johnstone;

Temptation by carlyshortphotography.net.

All others DGW.

Veritasse is a publisher of Christian art cards and prints at a range of prices, with a new website catering for both retail and trade customers. The website features high quality Christian-themed images and every picture on the site is available in 5 formats: greetings card, poster, mounted print, print onto canvas or large framed print. We are able to dispatch items internationally. Additional postage charges will apply to customers ordering from outside the UK, who may also have to pay customs duty on imported items. The new Veritasse website can be found at www.veritasse.co.uk Please contact Sue Newham, Veritasse manager, by e-mail if you have a query- sue.newham@veritasse.co.uk

2011 ACSD Training Conference

by Adrienne Thompson

'If you haven't experienced it, it isn't true.'

The fortunate people who attended the Biennial Training Event held in August will recognise the quote from Alexander Shaia. Unfortunately for those who missed out on the experience, an account of it will probably fall short of making it 'true' for you!

Conference theme was 'Encounters: God, Self, Others' and the few days we spent together were certainly full of memorable ones. Alexander is American, of Lebanese descent, grew up as an 'outsider' in Birmingham, Alabama, saw his grandmother's home torched by the KKK. A boy who followed family expectations to enter training for the priesthood, but changed directions to gather degrees in cultural anthropology and clinical psychology instead. He now travels and teaches.

He's a gentle, quiet speaker and his words are passionate and profound.

At the pre-event seminar, Alexander introduced us to a Navajo myth. We pondered how the story of *Wandering Girl who became Weaving Woman* connected with our own worlds. The hostess at Epsom Girls Grammar was baffled – why were people wandering around in silence and with such sad faces? She'd never seen such a gloomy lot of Christians! I guess meditation can look like that sometimes.

The event proper began Saturday morning with a wonderful powhiri. The dynamic kaumatua who welcomed us, ('proud to be Tuhoë, and not a terrorist') took the trouble to translate his prayers and speech. He explained the hongiri as a mingling of breath – and this led us straight into Alexander's introduction: *In the beginning God breathed.*

'If there is only one God, then we all share one breath, one story.' Alexander Shaia

'If there is only one God, then we all share one breath, one story.' Therefore, Alexander asserts, the four gospels are in reality four chapters of One Gospel, giving us the spiritual practices we need to deal with change, endure suffering, receive joy and mature in service. These are the 'four paths' of the one story in Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke-Acts: up the great mountain, around the stormy sea, in the glorious garden, and along the everyday road.

Alexander set each gospel in the context of the community from which it emerged. Particularly poignant, especially for our sisters and brothers from Christchurch, was the discovery that Matthew's gospel comes out of Antioch, a city repeatedly destroyed by earthquakes.

Matthew teaches us how to live with change, unpredictability and betrayal.

Learning about Mark's community in Rome, we were transfixed by Alexander's account of Nero's horrifying persecution. Mark shows Jesus walking the dangerous sea that for 1st C. Jews represents the abode of demons. Meditation on this image allows Jesus to be present to his beloved ones as they go to their deaths in the Circus Maximus.

An overarching theme was of the community '*that comes together to wrestle*' in Yeru-Shalom: the city of wholeness and peace; a place where polarities can co-exist, not because they're erased, but because each separate voice contributes to the harmony of the whole. This place becomes the 'one table' at which all are welcome, all bloodlines sacred, where no-one is excluded. Again poignantly, this insight from John's Gospel was shared the day of the horrifying racist massacre in Norway.

For Alexander, the gospels weren't written to be history or biography but as meditations for spiritual practice. In the same way, his presentations were invitations to engage with heart and soul, body and mind. We chanted readings from the Psalms (translation by a Rabbi who's also a Zen monk). After each talk, we deepened our engagement in small groups and brought our questions back into dialogue with Alexander.

Morning worship and evening Eucharist gave us all a chance to be together in a different way. Our conference song, composed by Jeannie Martin Blaker, helped us go 'deeper with others, ourselves and our God.' Worship reminded us of God's welcome and a hurting, needy world. We sat in quiet contemplation, and we collaborated in prayerful play and playful prayer. From this we built a 'temple' out of Lego! Another happy synchronicity, the reading from Ephesians had the same message of unity in diversity Alexander drew from John's gospel composed in Ephesus.

Auckland Hub Group did a superb job of organisation and coordination. Their thoughtful care for us began with information sent before we arrived, and surfaced again in our beautiful welcome kete with sweet treats and magazines. It showed up in our evening events – spiritual direction and culture Saturday and Fr. Chris Skinner's concert on Sunday.

Seeing ourselves as others see us can be salutary. Our American speaker was deeply moved by the richness, and contemporary reality of Maoritanga in Aotearoa. I've got used to it, but we were reminded again to be thankful for this *taonga*. Another gift was seeing and hearing from Christchurch people and becoming more aware of their suffering and their courageous endurance.

And finally, there were the times of conversation: meeting new people over meals and reconnecting with old friends. For me, as for most of us, our fellow spiritual directors are not so very thick on the ground. That sense of being with colleagues was something to relish.

At our farewell gathering we were given soap mixture and wands – once again the breath motif. This time our breath lifting shining and reflecting bubbles into the room. Had our hostess been present, she may have concluded spiritual directors can be as joyful as they are serious.

And in his final address, Alexander observed, 'Can anyone doubt the living Body of Jesus is here?' We prayed together and blessed each other and went our separate ways to walk the Fourth Path.

Thank you, Auckland people, for all the hours of hard work and creativity.

For more of Alexander's fascinating insights about communities in Ephesus (John) and on the road (Luke) check out www.quadratos.com and www.alexanderjshaia.com).



The Last Word

by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

Well, well, well. Here we are with a new editor for *Refresh* and it's me. You might say God wooed me into it. I tried to contemplate it away over a time, but the prompting to raise my hand for the task just kept on keeping on. My reluctance rose from my awe of the quality and reputation of *Refresh* and its contributors. I wasn't sure I was up to it... but then that's fairly consistent with my experience of call. I'm grateful to have been appointed.

As Spiritual Growth Ministries seeks to recommit itself to encouraging and equipping the contemplative life, it's my hope *Refresh* will capture even more deeply the heart of the contemplative in Aotearoa New Zealand. Those who contributed to this issue have made themselves vulnerable for us and I thank them. I edit as one who also has been wooed.

For those who don't know, I enjoy full time parish ministry in Wanaka – who wouldn't! I love being a Spiritual Director and leading retreats. Married to Reg, mother to Jess (30), step-grandma to Reg's 8 grandchildren.

You can comment on our *Refresh* Journal of Contemplative Spirituality page on Facebook. I'd be grateful if you 'like' it too! Please let me know what you think of my first edition dianegw@actrix.co.nz

May God's justice and peace surround you

Diane



The Way

*The Way can be steep and rough
but don't be afraid, my friend.
If you stumble a hundred times a day,
Love will always pick you up
and kiss your wounds so tenderly
that you may even feel pity
for those too strong to fall.*

Joy Cowley

The Winter Edition of Refresh is on the theme of 'Healing'.
Let me know if you'd like to contribute. And please, if there are any resources you
discover of interest to our readers, I'd welcome them.
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