

**Selections from Winter 2001 issue
of Spiritual Growth Ministries Journal of Contemplative Spirituality:**

Refresh

"Contemplative and Contemporary"

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COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

To be human is to be contemplative! This crisp statement caught my imagination at a time when with many people I assumed that contemplation and a contemplative view of prayer and life was something for the special few who made it well up the slopes of the mountain of contemplation. It signalled a changing view of contemplation which is now widely held – that to be human is to have the gift of gazing, wondering and reflecting.

We all began life that way. That's how we learned about and participated in our world. Even before birth we were absorbing sound, movement, emotion and rhythm. The awe, wonder, receptivity, openness and trust of babies and little children is something Jesus saw as the stuff of what it's like to be open to and receptive of the God's kingdom.

Yet it isn't easy to carry this insightfulness into later life as the pressures mount to be productive, to meet the obligations of life and study and to participate in work and the world at large. These pressures squeeze this

God-given ability and do it a major damage in many of us. Thankfully the heart calls, God calls and so much of life and creation call to be seen, heard, known and enjoyed amidst the challenges of life and schooling, work and relationships. Today's welcome postmodern reaction to the stress of modern life and work and being Church expresses a healthy desire for deeper things.

Moreover, Jesus invites us to live our lives in union with him as he lives with us – and that's a contemplative way of life and faith!

This era in the life of the people of God, and of people in the western world, is a time of honest searching for ways of living life and faith more deeply. It's time when many people are rediscovering and acquiring afresh this wonderful gift of contemplation and the prayer that flows from it – a loving attentiveness which detects the presence of God's love, an openness to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a delight in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

This new Journal of Contemplative Spirituality is our contribution to this growing thirst for deeper and quieter ways of being human, and of being people of faith at prayer, work and worship.

While we see the contemplative way as one of the ways people build their life and faith it obviously poses some good questions and challenges for all of us.

How far is Christian faith a matter of truths and beliefs, of guidelines and right words, and how far is it an ongoing experience of God's grace and presence? What part does spiritual (or religious) experience play in normal Christian life? And how do we foster and deepen this experience?

How do we learn the language of silence and hear the still small voice when it whispers to us in meditation and contemplation? How will the Word be heard and recognized when there is little stillness of heart and mind, a poverty of interior spaciousness and solitude?

With so much emphasis in our churches on programmes and service how do we save ourselves and our people from being programmed out? And when people are burnt out or off or up how do we care for them and nurture faith in them?

And how do we foster in our children and young people their own felt experiences of God's love?

We trust that this Journal will encourage you as you read and ponder. May you find afresh the joy of God and wonder in living a contemplative life of faith in the here and now.

BREATHING OUR NATIVE AIR - BEING CONTEMPLATIVE IN THE CONTEMPORARY

by John Franklin

Not long after the Romans, my 9 year old son Peter seems to think, there were the 1970s. In my twenties then, and a student at Princeton Seminary, I enjoyed the hospitality of a fine family in the town. One day, when there seemed to be no one else around, the mother of the house (whose name I do not remember) said, "You know, there is hardly a committee or project I haven't been part of in our church. And goodness knows how many sermons I have ever heard, but I have a question that I'm too embarrassed to ask our pastor. He would think I'm a real fool. But since you're a student here, and you already have some experience of ministry, you might be able to tell me: What has Jesus got to do with all this?"

In my twenties I never thought to wonder what the sub-text of her question was, let alone ask about the question behind the question. So I launched forth with an answer to the question as presented. John's three good points on what Jesus has got to do with 'all this' may have been quite eloquent, even passionate. But somehow I knew I had missed the mark completely. I was aware that nothing had shifted for her. I had given her more of what she already had; reasons. That was not enough to kindle a smouldering wick. I suppose she pulled herself together again and got on with it as a loyal churchwoman should, utterly unaware of Evelyn Underhill's saying: "How horribly stuffy and exhausted...our religious atmosphere gets sometimes, how utterly we forget that we live and move and have our being in a God Who fills the whole universe." [1]

A quarter century later I wonder if she was not a beached contemplative. She was beached in the busyness of church, and behind her was an ocean - something inherently attractive and fearfully unknown. Looking back, I suspect that what sustained her was the meaning she gleaned from her busy loyalty, but she was malnourished for want of living encounter with God. Somehow, her birthright was being denied and with some sadness for her answer, I listen to Parker Palmer's line, "Ask me whether what I have done is my life." [2] I see a woman who was responsive to many voices, but not her own before God.

Two blocks away from this family's beautiful Princeton home, I was feasting. I was part of a small group that met for an hour at 6am every weekday morning and sat in rich, presence-filled silence in the Seminary chapel. Together we basked in what C. S. Lewis calls, "The weight of glory." [3] Here were two different worlds in the same neighbourhood. There seemed to be something timeless where I was. But the local church world was very 'modern'. And there was a woman whose faith world was about church rather than God. It was a model church - everything well organised, well reasoned, well programmed and well presented. But was so well done that there was little room for mystery, or wonder. It was one of those environments in which people had banded themselves together to protect themselves from God - words of Tildern Edwards.

My experience of the 'modern world' of my youth was that mystery was not admissible. I remember a visiting Scottish preacher at St David's, Auckland in the late 60s tentatively admitting that there might be a lot more religious experience out there than we might be aware of. But the message was, "Be careful." I was fascinated, but what was I to do with my own experience?

Like the night I was walking home from the bus stop. It was the last bus from downtown Auckland. The night was still. The sky was vast and shinning. The breeze was gentle on my face. And God was in it all. In God I saw that all the stars, the trees, the people of the earth, and even me walking home, were like organ pipes. Each was breathing sound, and the whole universe was filled with the most glorious, unifying resonance, the sound of the praise of God. I could have walked a hundred miles but home came first.

As an eighteen year old, I was captivated, entranced, and felt the vastness holding together in wonder, love and praise. And I felt held, secure and confident in a very different way from the testosterone-fired indestructibility common to the male youth. Here was a contemplative who had never heard of contemplation. What do you do with such experience? I said nothing. To whom should I go when I was told that the 'mystical' was for strange people and not part of the real world? Besides, the Beatles were not singing about it!

My years at university followed. I discovered poets, monks, mystics and musicians who seemed to have words for what no one else was telling me. There was John Donne praying that God be thorough with him: "Batter my heart, three-personed God..." Bernard of Clairvaux saw the love of God in all things. The outrageous Francis of Assisi invited me to trust and to laugh. Thomas Kelly seemed to see the holy presence in everything. And J.S. Bach, a man who dedicated everything to the glory of God, provided me with a 'transport of delight', a superhighway into the Presence.

These were spiritual-life tutors who were ready to be met. I had found companions who were there before the 'modern' era had appeared. I felt as though I was reading them undercover, like the child with a book and a torch under the blankets. They reassured me that 'modern' was not the only definition of reality. I did not have to accept the claims of 'this world' as infallible and unquestionable.

Somehow they introduced me to others, wise ones who knew that there was more than what our 'modern' world made room for. As I talked with a few others, I began to find that my experience of God was not unusual at all. But it felt like being a part of a secret society because, in a culture that had broken the silence around sex and politics, religious experience was still under wraps. I remained careful who I talked to, as was the woman I knew in Princeton.

I talked to my parish minister and said I had a call. I understood it as a call to ministry. Parish ministry being the only model of 'religious life' that a Protestant youth had, I had no idea it was a call to the contemplative life. Even so, I began theological studies with huge excitement. I had naively expected to be embraced into a community of passionate pilgrims intent on pursuing the Fire of Love that fuelled all worship and ministry. But not so. Ironically, my theological studies gave me a good theological education but no spiritual formation, let alone nourishment. So much was oriented toward the logical and empirical. I discovered that religion was a fascinating human behaviour, but I found the approach to be objective, reductionist and not valuing of mystery. 'Modern Man' was in control of theological education at the time, leaving little room for something more, something intuitive, something that resonated through centuries of wisdom and experience that the presumptuous modern world made little allowance for. There was not much soul space in this world of chrome and formica.

Even in the face of Lloyd Geering's predictions that the church would be shrunken beyond recognition by the end of the century, Christendom's local agents continued to reassuringly sing of how the church would stand forever, presumably in the same known mould. But almost subversive of The Establishment, and commentators like Geering, something else was happening. Beyond some of the trite music, the personality cults and the rather strange thinking in some of New Zealand's charismatic moving, something was happening that was taking 'Modern Man' by surprise. In charismatic circles, people were experiencing God. This generated an explosion of excitement that caused enormous pain and division in some New Zealand churches. But as a fruit of their charismatic experience, people were experiencing and talking about contemplation - living in and dwelling in the Presence - even if they were not using the word. They were finding God in them, the hope of glory. They were free to stand there rather than do something, and be with Charles Wesley, "lost in wonder, love and praise."

As the late Fr Kieran Hynes of Southern Star Abbey, Kopua said to me ten years later, "Our task is done. What God had entrusted to us [monks] for all these centuries, he is now giving to the whole church. Take what we have and go with God."

Go with God. Is that the post-modern call? If it is, I wonder what it means. As our faith ancestors, Abraham and Sarah left Ur, are we to leave the known culture and civilisation of Church and venture into new ways of gathering, and being, and celebrating as the people of God? But what of our heritage? What can we take with us? Surely, it is back to basics. We go with the Word, the Spirit, each other and the wisdom of the communion of saints. And, here is a practical thought, if we leave Ur/Church behind, who gets the real estate?

Going with God may call up another image too. As cultural forces have irrevocably changed the central, 'Temple' place that church has had in our society, we are off to, or perhaps are already in, exile - as Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann compels us to see. How we are to sing the Lord's song in a strange new land, is the pressing question. The 2001 Parachute Festival was asking how Christian music can be made mainstream on New Zealand radio. The answer seems to lie in quality. (Do you sing your favourite hymn/song to yourself in the shopping mall?) But does singing the quality song and practising the tried and proven faith of our ancestors, in exile, still make us ghettoed? Are we becoming so different from our society that we are becoming what the Jews were to European society before Hitler - a self consciously different community in a not very hospitable world? I wonder.

What seems clear to me is that going with God may be different from going with 'Church', at least the models of church that were part of our 'modern' world. We do not need the data of census and surveys to know that our institutional faith-packages seem to have reached their best-by date. My friend's church in Princeton may well be doing fine, as many still are, but it seems to me that as church defined, articulated and managed the faith of its members in the modern world, the reverse is now happening. I think that the faith experience of God's people is now what will define what church is and how we are to be church. In other words, as the modern church made us, in this post-modern reality, it is ours to make church because the church is us, not a Company Limited.

Judith Anne O'Sullivan, Congregational Leader of the Dominicans in New Zealand, tells me that Christianity, our Christ-centred experience and understanding of God has no future unless we are mystics. This obviously means that we are not to set up 0900 services! But I like this thought because it speaks to me about the necessity of letting our relationship with God define who we are as individuals and as faith communities.

And that can happen in any grouping. It may well happen in the increasingly vacant spaces that are our parish churches. Two or three can gather anywhere. My wife and I gather at home with two special friends once a fortnight. We talk of what is happening for us, what we perceive God to be doing. We call each other out to listen to what we are saying and challenge each other to obedience. The prayer is very real.

Faith coaching can happen with friends, a book, an evening walk, and with great music. And another way in which my developing relationship with God is enhanced, is with my spiritual director - the focused, contracted work I do that is different from what happens in a gathering with soul-mates, or in a worship service or any other experience. And I note here Alan Jamieson's [4] reflection that in the post-modern demise of institutional Church, the role of the spiritual director is increasingly important for people still on an active faith journey without Church. And even on the High Feast of Resurrection, we did it differently from the usual Church way. The family gathered with me at the kitchen table. We read the gospel and we celebrated the eucharist using the words of Janet Morely [5] for Easter Day. It was profoundly moving. And then we went tramping in the Tararuas, in territory that Paul Hawker highlighted in his book 'Soul Survivor' [6]. With all of this, I am still part of an institutional church. I need the larger gathering. I sing in the 5pm choir and love it, but I tend to find a greater experience of 'church' outside of Church.

With 'modern' gone, many old certainties have gone too and 'post-modern' challenges me to take full responsibility for who I am and how I am before God in this world. But this is nothing new in itself, which leads me to this thought: Perhaps this indefinable, unboundaried thing we call 'post-modern' is an invitation to step out of faith's religious packaging and just 'go for God'. The tradition is ancient. Is that not what the Hebrew prophets were about? Is that not what Jesus was about?

What is the Lord asking of us? The question is in my face. It is both profound and simple. I believe the old words, "Follow me," are sounding very loudly. Follow me... Where? How? And before I let the questions railroad my response, I hear that great Southern gentlemen of God, Carlyle Marney, saying, "There is no knowledge of God that is not the fruit of obedience." [7]

The path of obedience is about trusting and following. People as diversely contemplative as author Henry Nouwen and TV evangelist Joyce Meyer are saying the same thing: Follow Jesus! We cannot live anyone else's faith. We cannot make do with mere 'religion'. We have to risk, and re-risk daily, a living encounter with our God. We have to listen to the legion of voices that drive us, and ask, what is the one that is the voice of God. And while we may never get our hear-point quite right, we can pray with Merton trusting "... that the desire to please you, does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing." [8] He, as a contemplative, sought to obey and follow - and not infrequently without criticism.

The risky path of obedience, while solitary at times, is not lonely. There are friends to be met - other people who are willing to listen, obey and trust also. They are what Quaker, Thomas Kelly, calls "The Blessed Community" [9]. We may know them as "The Mad Ones" - those who are willing to listen to a voice other than the voices of anxiety, convention, and what the prevailing culture says is possible. They may be as busy as the likes of St Theresa or Mother Theresa. They may have quieter lives like the prayerful old man I saw on the beach or the Carmelites on Mt Albert Road.

And the Communion of Saints embraces people who have lived through equally bewildering re-formations of the Church with courage and integrity in other times. Benedict was one. He reminds us that church is built on a respect for people rather than a love of liturgy or order or programs per se. He is probably walking with Bonhoeffer who said: "He who loves community destroys community; he who loves the brethren loves community." [10]

The re-formation that seems to be what post-modernism is asking of us as church, is not a call to pietism and individualism. Neither is the call to the contemplative life a call to pietism and individualism. It is a balanced call to attend to God in us and God in the community. Alone and in community, we as church, are called to listen, to let go, to love and to obey - and frankly admit that more often than not, we do not know what is happening, except that God is at work. If we can desire God more than a blue-print for a new church, God is free to lead us. There is a lot to let go of, but as Eckhart says, "The fruit of letting go is birth."

"What was the best thing before sliced bread?" George Carley whimsically asks. We could ask what the best thing was before post-modernism. I think it might be the same thing that will be the best thing after post-modernism. Historical periods come and go but transcending them all is the gracious invitation to be in robust relationship with our God. So may God dwell within us - transforming us and our world. That is what makes a contemplative active, and an active contemplative. Being contemplative in the contemporary is part of the great commission to any generation - with Evelyn Underhill, calling the world around us to "breathe the atmosphere of Eternity" which is our "native air." [11]

His world was modern, but Dag Hammarskjöld was characteristically contemplative. He was a man who transcended his culture and breathed an eternal air. I invite you, as church, to pray with him:

Thou who art - Also within us.
 May all see Thee - in me also,
 May I prepare the way for Thee,
 May I thank Thee for all that shall fall to my lot,
 May I also not forget the needs of others,
 Keep me in Thy love
 As Thou wouldst that all should be kept in mine.
 May everything in this my being be directed to Thy glory
 And may I never despair
 For I am under Thy hand,

And in Thee is all power and goodness.
 Give me a pure heart - that I may see Thee,
 A humble heart - that I may hear Thee,
 A heart of love - that I may serve Thee,
 A heart of faith - that I may abide in Thee. [12]

1 Evelyn Underhill, "Possibilities in Prayer," in *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy*. Ed. Dana Greene, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988, p.138.

2 Parker Palmer, *Letting Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California, 1999.

3 C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975.

4 Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Outside the Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches in New Zealand*, PhD. Diss. University of Canturbury, 1989.

5 Janet Morely, *All Desires Known*. Morehouse-Barlow Co, Wilton, Connecticut, 1988, pp. 16-17, 42-43.

6 Paul Hawkins, *Soul Survivor*. Northstone, Kelowna, BC, Canada, 1998.

7 Carlyle Marney, *Tape from Princeton Institute of Theology*, 1976.

8 Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*. Burns and Oates, London, 1958, p. 81.

9 Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*. Harper & Row, New York, 1941, p. 77ff.

10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. SCM Press, London, 1954.

11 Evelyn Underhill, "Possibilities in Prayer," p. 137.

12 Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964, p. 100.

MEETING GOD IN THE STRETCH AND FLEX

by Helen Gray

I slipped into my parka, and followed the group out into the cold, damp afternoon.

Heavy rain had kept us in at the Lodge that morning, so we had spent time exploring meditation and contemplation. We learned that while meditation investigates (a mind activity), contemplation wonders. It is an attitude of reverent openness, which allows one to be captivated by something, to be lifted out of oneself.

I was one of ten participants in the Wilderness Experience last November, on the low slopes of Mt Ruapehu. We spent as much time as possible outdoors, walking in that wonder-filled wilderness, open to how God may want to meet with us there. I was delighted that we had been discussing contemplation; it had always appealed, but was still rather a mystery to me. Now was my chance to get it sorted out. Just what was contemplation; was it something I already did or had I yet to learn how; was it even attainable by ordinary me, or was it the fruit of a long life of disciplined devotion? So I walked out eager to learn more about contemplation. I was ready to stand and gaze, I thought, to be caught up in wonder, to enjoy God. However, as we crossed the scrubland, it occurred to me that there was enough to gaze in wonder at in the first metre of the track: tiny flowers, the intricate patterning of leaves. But the thought of stopping to receive was met with resistance from within. A major dilemma emerged. I wanted to move, to get physical – we'd had a sedentary morning. Yet wasn't contemplation to do with being still in body; wasn't getting close to God a spiritual activity, not a physical one? Would I miss out by being active? It was a risk; I vacillated, and then followed the urge to keep moving. I rationalised, "I'll contemplate the larger dimensions of creation, and after I've walked out this caged energy, then I'll sit and gaze. So I strode on out past the wonders of the bush.

I headed up towards Tama Lakes, with the knowledge that I'd be unlikely to get there and back in the time available. Anyway, I reasoned, pushing on to achieve a goal might close me off from God. Instead I settled into a sustainable rhythm of walking which allowed me to look and delight in what I was seeing as the landscape unfolded around me. And it was wonderful: rise followed rise of seemingly bleak windswept desolation, yet closer up one could see intriguing alpine plants – some in flower – amongst the rock and ash. I was quite surprised to soon find myself at the lower lake. I tucked myself into a sheltered spot amongst the inaka and hebes, aware of a growing joy. It was grand to just be, to be alive with God in that place. I thought, now for some contemplation. I waited quietly. But my eyes kept straying to the steep rocky path up towards the upper lake. It seemed like an invitation to adventure further with God, so I set off up the track. It was really windy and exposed and exciting! Again, it didn't take as long as I'd expected; I was thrilled to be up there seeing it all! The desert road was visible to the east, and looking back the way I'd come I saw the Chateau standing among folds of soft, hazy, bush-covered ridges.

As I walked back, I became totally filled with a deep loving joy. The elation of having got up high to unexpected views; the sensation of warmth and elasticity as I strode along; the restoration of a sense of physical ability (so often eroded by comparison with my superfit family) - all contributed to a marvelling, a wonder at God's amazing creation - in this case, me! And not only am I created - I am sustained - by God. It is through God alone that I can draw breath. God was the source of the life-energy flowing through me. I felt I was experiencing 'God-within' in a deeply empowering way: both physical and spiritual, - emotional, even. The image of Jesus and his Father making their home in those who love and obey him (John 14:23) had been poignantly meaningful to me for the past year or so. I had been learning to view prayer as a matter of getting in touch with God who dwells within, and enlarging that God-space. Now God's totally accepting presence was infusing and restoring me.

Because of my eagerness to learn about contemplation, I later sought to analyse my experience. I'd had a wonderful encounter with God, but was it contemplation? It hadn't involved stillness - it was a very active experience. I had associated contemplation with use of the five senses, especially looking and listening, but my key experience had involved what I think of as the kinaesthetic sense: whole body movement. It had to do with bodily warmth, of muscular stretch and flex. And, it didn't lift me out of myself; rather it put me back, wonderfully whole, inside myself. Barry and Connolly (p.49) write, "Contemplation leads to, or rather is an experience of, transcendence - that is, forgetfulness of self and of everyone and everything else except the contemplated object". That didn't feel like my experience. My object of contemplation was God-in-me. So, was I getting too self-absorbed? Do we need to leave self behind to be caught up in God?

Each day of the retreat we had the opportunity in the evenings to reflect on our experiences of the day. I wondered about checking out my thoughts with the group, but it was too fresh and precious to risk it yet, so I sought out one of the leaders in a quiet corner, and aired my dilemma with him. He encouraged me not to dismiss it as too introspective, but to be open to God in it, and to observe the fruit. So I decided not to worry how it was defined, but just to stay with it. Maybe this opening oneself kinaesthetically to God was a new area to think about some other time. I had a fairly strong idea that, had I resisted the urge to get physical, I would have missed out on a deeply restorative gift from God.

It has borne fruit. Along with other encounters in that fertile wilderness, and a grace-filled Communion service, the experience bought me a deeper certainty of God's indwelling power and love, and desire to give myself more wholeheartedly. Now, I've got the chance to explore the area of 'kinaesthetic contemplation', and I do so here because it contains issues that others may relate to, may also have struggled with. The involvement of our whole bodies in prayer, in meeting with God, receives little mention in most writing and preaching on the spiritual life. We so often take a head approach to spirituality. "A lot of people use their bodies simply to carry their heads around" (Stevens, p. 19). Do we feel safer there? Are we still living under the shadow of dualist reasoning? "Christianity has been affected by the Greek philosophy which separated the spiritual from the physical. The theologians said that the spiritual is good and the physical distracting, even evil," John Hunt writes in his discussion of Celtic spirituality (p. 9).

Many Christians would agree that bodily exertion has its place in serving God, but may be less sure whether it fits into *listening* to God. Contemplative spirituality has included opportunities to use our bodies in our opening to God:

- simple postural habits, like standing to sing, kneeling to pray, raising hands in praise, cupping hands to receive
- using awareness of breathing, and of the touch of clothes, the pressure of the chair, in the stilling prayer process (though there is a fine line between quieting the body to free the spirit and actually using our bodies to 'listen'.)
- enjoying time for a 'prayer walk', a contemplative exercise using all the senses
- Celtic spirituality, where daily physical activities are opportunities for prayer. The Celts drew no distinctions between the spiritual and the physical.

Yet these activities, while proclaiming that we can meet with God through our senses, still do not involve the degree of vigour that seemed important in my Tama Lakes encounter. That was more akin to times when I used dance to pray. Overloaded with words, I found I could open best to God by dancing to Ramirez's Creole Mass. My movements unlocked a deep reservoir of repentance and gratitude, and brought God's love to me wondrously.

Sam Keen (in Stevens, p. 29) writes: " The body has wisdom to teach that the mind knows not of. It understands much of the rhythm and timing which is easily forgotten when life is ruled exclusively by ideas. Such fundamental themes as the relation between activity and passivity, strength and weakness, tension and relaxation, disease and grace, are more easily learned from bodily movement than from conceptual analysis."

My reflection leaves me with these musings:

1). The common principle that we receive in proportion to what we invest may also apply to our spirituality. The more involved we are - physically, through the senses, imaginatively, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually - in the encounters, the more fully God can gift to us. After all, God is the ultimate multi-media expert! Scripture expresses it in Deut 6:5 "Love God with all your heart, soul and strength".

2). Rather than being suspicious of yoga, or even whirling dervishes, let's consider what they teach us about getting physically involved in the process of opening to God. The God who created our bodies with such capacity for vitality and grace can surely be trusted to aid us in the godly and appropriate use of that energy.

3). If contemplation is of the God-out-there, then opening to God is enhanced by using the five senses to receive God whose message is expressed wordlessly through creation (Psalm 19:1-4). Perhaps the kinaesthetic sense is particularly suitable when we want to listen to the God who dwells within.

4). The involvement of our whole body in prayer may be especially helpful in those times when we get stuck in our usual ways of praying. The joy of contemplative encounters is that they are not a mind activity like meditation, but a marvelling. I read of a woman whose usual prayer words had run dry. She writes "Then one morning, in the middle of a dance class, I discovered that ...all along I had been dancing my way to God and with God. That insight freed me and opened new ways of relating to God. When one vocabulary failed, I tried another," (Dilenschneider, p. 46).

In conclusion, contemplation can happen in a myriad of ways. The key is this marvelling at God. When we do, it opens us to be captivated and infused by God. One of the guidelines given for developing a contemplative attitude that morning on retreat had been to find what thrills our soul, and do more of it. It sounded good, but I did not realise how fettered I was by preconceptions, built up of impressions gleaned from here and there over the years. I will remember Tama Lakes as the place where some of those fetters were broken, thanks be to God!

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PILGRIMS' QUESTIONS

by Peter Atkinson

God,
 Who are we?
 And where are we going, and is it much further?
 What will it be like?
 And what can we bring with us?
 It seems at times
 The answers keep changing
 Like the songs and hymns that come and go in our repertoire:
 Sometimes with language rich and saturated
 with pilgrimage,
 Sometimes in words that strain self-consciously to create new vision,
 Something we heard someone say that sounded good at the time.
 Voices come and go,
 Parts enter and harmonies change
 Where are we going,
 On this ancient journey, well travelled and populated
 With the tales of those who have gone before,
 Whose footsteps echo in the tread of our own?
 What vision draws us on?
 What promise? What dread? What thirst
 Fashions this inward deep that answers to your voice?
 Jesus, fair companion.
 Who draws near to ask of us these questions,
 Who listens to our stories
 And laughs and weeps at our response,
 Who smiles with such gentle understanding
 And whose penetrating gaze
 Unsettles our certainties,
 We thank you for the journey:
 For things now less sure,
 Convictions which daily grow,
 And for new possibilities
 That flourish in your presence
 Among us on the way.

CONTEMPLATION FOR EXTRAVERTS

by John North

I have sometimes been confronted by a situation where everything I'd prepared was totally out of step with the people I was trying to lead. This was not simply a matter of personality type but of the total social setting of the group.

There were about 30 young pastors who were required to do a three day retreat as part of their continuing education experience. I was pleased to be asked to lead and planned an evening introductory session in which we could move towards a quiet and more contemplative mood. But these people were old friends who had not seen each other for quite a while and had a lot of catching up to do. The Friary rocked with the overflow of fun, hilarity and story telling. I began my planned session but after about 15 minutes, I knew it wasn't going to work. We needed a change of plan. There was no way we could become contemplative until a large amount of steam had been blown off so we opened the evening for this process. Already next morning, we were moving to a quieter and more receptive mode. I hope I have learned something about being in touch with the realities of a gathering and about allowing necessary processes to run their course.

The mood of retreatants is also determined by the every-day patterns and pressures of their lives. Once I was with a smaller group of ministry students out in a rural setting. They arrived about 10.00 on a glorious morning and after a snack, I suggested they could take some time to slow down. They could explore the grounds, sit outside in the sun, wander along a country road, relax and reflect on God in this peaceful setting. I thought it would have been an experience to leap at, but no. The students looked bewildered and lost. For they came from a world of schedules and timetables. Classes were held from 9 till 12. Essays had to be in on Friday. Exams were coming up at the beginning of next month. They lived in a time frame organized by others and followed the schedule every day. Now, suddenly, there was a two hour gulf to fill in without a "have to". No wonder they looked lost.

Once again I had miscalculated and needed to "get real" about the situation. What these people needed was a little structure, a starting point such as a Bible passage to read through and choose a significant word or phrase. A simple task was the doorway into a quietening process.

It is interesting to notice the various ways we react to a profound experience. Again, this is not simply a matter of personality difference but a reflection of our mood on a given day or hour. After a close encounter with the divine some will want to sing, dance or go whooping down the road. Others may be reduced to tears and need the opportunity to be alone to ponder and process and respond. It's not a matter of right or wrong but how different people react at different times.

Traditional contemplative patterns encourage solitude and silence, listening to God and giving answer. The experience may be shared with one other person such as a spiritual director or close friend. But there is a contrasting tradition of community, sharing life, insights and prayers, being encouraged and challenged by others. Those who are spiritual directors or retreat leaders need to be able to appreciate the value of this other tradition and leave room for appropriate sharing of faith and experience. Some of us best process our experience of God in solitude and silence. Others do this best in a group, receiving insight as they try to articulate their experience, encounters and longings within a trusted group.

I believe we need to acknowledge and explore different models of contemplation all of which are, after all, means to the end of knowing God.

WASTELAND TO WILDERNESS

by Warren Deason

"The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness..." Mark 1:12

When Jesus was baptised he was reassured that he was named and known by God.

We too are named and known by God. We too can hear the words, "Beloved, I take pleasure in you."

But living with that identity is another thing. It raises new questions and new tensions for us as we shrug off what we were and seek to become what God makes of us.

Part of this struggle needs to take place in the depth of silence and darkness, the place where the tensions and the rawness of our humanity will become apparent.

Like Jesus we are called to the wilderness place. This is not an invitation we respond to with much enthusiasm. It will probably remain pinned by a cute magnet to the refrigerator door, reminding us of something we ought to do but something we know we probably will not. We fear the wild place, the wilderness, because we see it as a place that will offer us little or nothing except to impose undue hardship upon our comfortable lives. We see time spent there as a waste. We see wilderness as wasteland, as unproductive land. This is our mistake: we confuse wilderness with wasteland.

Ironically it is the reverse that is true for most of us. It is the unproductive wasteland in which we are living and it is the gifts of the wilderness that we need to seek.

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence...
For those who walk in darkness
Both in the daytime and in the night time
The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice.

From *Ash Wednesday* – T.S.Eliot.

It is the noisy wasteland of much of our superficial and materialistic society that masks the "voice" of the Holy One. In our wasteland we are insulated, driven and distracted, in the wilderness the soft-cushions and landings are taken away – we descend with a bump into our struggle with our identity as given by God.

The question is posed (in the other gospel accounts of Jesus' time in the wilderness) in that way, "If you are the Son of God then...". But Mark is terse, "The Adversary tested him" (Mark 1:13). The wasteland masks and sedates the voice of our struggles; the wilderness is an amplifier. The struggles rise up in our faces. In the wasteland "ones own self is well hidden from ones own self" (Neitzsche)

In the wilderness that hidden self becomes distressingly clear. The adversary – the accuser- the opponent (within and without us) seeks to draw us away from grace and the call of the Greater Love. The adversary attempts to seduce us from God's intention for our lives. The adversary attempts to distract and divert. But this Greater Love is present here – even in the struggle and the darkness.

We bring our identity – our sense of who we are in God into the struggle. Jesus found even in this place, the wilderness – where the enemy was so vivid and the conflict sharp – that "God had prepared a table for him even in the presence of his enemies".

So for us too. The wilderness can be Bethel.

THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE Aged From 15 To 25

by *John Heberton*

Introduction

What is the place for Spiritual Direction in a ministry among young people aged from 15 To 25? According to some spiritual directors there is no place. Surely, they suggest, one needs to be older, in midlife at least, to gain anything from receiving spiritual direction. As young people aren't at that "life stage" yet, it is not appropriate. Discipleship is offered as a more appropriate way to help young people grow.

Other directors and some "youth workers" believe that because of the issues raised by a young person's stage of life and identity formation it would be very helpful for young people to be offered spiritual direction. Seventeen of these people replied to a questionnaire conducted as part of this research paper done by me for my training in spiritual direction, all of them describing their ministry of spiritual direction among 15 to 25 years olds.

In order to be clearer about the place of spiritual direction with 15 to 25 year olds, we need to ask several questions:

- Would spiritual direction help or hinder the spiritual development of this age group?
- Would the actual process of direction differ from working with people in older age groups?

This paper will seek to briefly address these questions.

Why 15 to 25 year olds?

It is currently very trendy to talk about Generation X and Y. Instead I have taken a "Life Course Perspective" using human development theory. This perspective describes adolescence as a time of preparation for the transition from childhood to adulthood. Some of the markers or transition points into the adult world have been described as: exit from school; entrance into the workforce; departure from the family of origin; marriage and establishment of their own household. None of these transition points are static, but move with the economic and political culture of the time as we have seen in recent years in New Zealand. Many more young people having to go on to tertiary education and are thereby delaying their entry into the workforce. The average age for marriage has risen from early to late 20's, and the average age of first time mothers now stands at 30.

Fifteen to twenty-five has been chosen as the point of life where the move into the adult world becomes most acute. At 15 most young people have to make decision about what they will do after they leave school, and are beginning to be given adult responsibilities. Twenty-five is the age young people are no longer deemed to be dependant on their parents income in terms of being eligible for student allowances as tertiary students.

The use of these ages is not to suggest that all fifteen to twenty-five year olds are in late adolescence. Some will achieve entry into the adult world at a much younger age. Others will take even longer.

Would spiritual direction help or hinder the spiritual development of this age group?

The fifteen to twenty five year old is moving from the world of the child in preparation to move into the world of the adult. Erik Erikson and his foundational work on Ego Identity Development from a Psychosocial Perspective is one of the main theorists used to help understand this stage. He describes this time as being marked by the task of ego identity formation, answering the question, "who am I?"

The work of answering this question is aided by the growing ability to use what Jean Piaget describes as formal operational thought. In describing how the structures of logical scientific thinking develop in a person from birth through to adulthood. Piaget describes adolescence as marking the move from Concrete Operational Thought to Formal Operational Thought. Concrete Operational Thought is bound by reality, with the thinker finding it difficult to imagine anything they have not personally experienced. With the advent of Formal Operational Thought, reality becomes just one possibility. As the adolescent develops this ability, they are able to think about possibilities, moving between abstract ideas and concepts easily, and to generate alternative possibilities. They begin to not accept points of view uncritically, but to logically examine and argue for alternative positions. Lastly, the development of Formal Operational thought brings the ability to be able to think about what you are thinking. This means I can examine why I believe something, and what it would be like to believe something else.

This last point is important, as we form our identity in relation with others, with parents and family, peers and friends, and others. It is formed in the context of those groups, and the other social groups and institutions we belong to (schools and church) and which have an influence on our lives, and in the wider social context. It is within these relationships that the young person learns to make meaning from their experiences, religious and otherwise, and through that learn to make meaning for their lives, to answer, who am I and where do I belong.

The work of the Search Institute in the United States has identified a list of forty developmental assets or factors that promote healthy development and reduce the likelihood of adolescents participating in behaviour that puts them at risk. They identify the external assets or networks of support needed for young people to develop the internal assets or supports they need to achieve identity formation and to carry them into adult life. They list these four in particular.

- Other adult relationships – young person receives support from 3 or more non-parent adults (Asset 3)
- Community values youth – young person perceives that adults in the community value youth (Asset 7)
- Adult role models – parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour (Asset 14)
- Religious community – young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution (Asset 19)

These assets stand with a growing body of research that suggests both the importance of large social networks, and in particular non-parental adults in helping young people form an adequate sense of who they are. It is these relationships, along with family and peers that offer the young person the opportunity to develop the internal assets they need to achieve identity formation.

At the heart of this identity is the issue of faith: what gives meaning to my life and to what do I commit myself to. At the heart of ministry with this age group must be a concern to help them in the task of identity formation. Particularly, helping them experience their identity as people of great value in the eyes of a loving God. This sense of identity comes from young people both growing in their sense of experiencing the divine in their every day lives, and having the opportunity to critically reflect on those experiences. For this they need adults willing to spend time with them, listen to their stories, and help them ask good questions of the experience, and of themselves and their world. Spiritual direction as defined by Barry and Connelly has an important part to play in helping young people during this time. Rather than hinder identity formation, it would greatly help young people determine for themselves who they are in the eyes of God, and in their own eyes.

As part of the research for this paper, three young people who have been receiving spiritual direction since they were in their late teens/early twenties were asked to give an account of their experience. "A" spoke of how important spiritual direction had been for her.

"As a young woman, leaving home, making the transition to young adulthood, negotiating the new relationships of boarding and flatting, finding a church, I was also glad to have a Spiritual Director. It wasn't important for me just because of crisis. A lot changes in your landscape at that time in your life and having someone who companions you in an intentional way, seeking with you to discern the movement of God in your life seems to be a crucial thing to me.

I needed to work out how to pray in the world of new ideas at university.

I needed to learn how to pray when illness made much in my familiar world impossible.

I needed to work out what I needed or wanted in a church community and what to do when I didn't find one that met my needs Sunday by Sunday. What did that mean for my sense of self in relation to God?

I needed to work out what it might mean to be a faithful person in the context of choices about study paths and career options. And in relationship.

In the years running up to being 25 I left home, studied overseas, went to university, dealt with a debilitating illness, chose not to be involved in a traditional parish community, moved cities several times, attended to my inner world by engaging in psychotherapy, started university again, met and married my life partner, applied for ordination, was selected, trained and ordained.

Having a spiritual director meant that I had a regular space to think/reflect/pray about how God was present with me in all that. I had a person who resourced me in the decisions about how best I might pray in with and through some of those changes. I had an advocate and support of my vocation as it emerged and as I chose to express it in the church: an environment that was often difficult, even hostile, for a young woman."

Clearly then the offering of spiritual direction would be of enormous benefit to the young people in this stage of life, helping them establish a sense of identity, and their sense of life in God. It is not being suggested that it is the only component to ministry with fifteen to twenty fives, but that it is offered as one of many ways young people are engaged. It is not offered instead of discipleship training, educational or pastoral support.

OUR YOUTH RETREAT

by Anna Johnstone

Another one? How exciting! Having four of the young people at our Church baptised or confirming their baptism was very significant. Another two were considering it.

Ideas for helping them grow and reflect on this step ranged from a series of weekly classes, using a manual we'd need to write (Horrors! Too hard right now, not enough time) a one-day seminar (too short) or, our final choice, a two-day Retreat (Just right).

Marie Ellis and I got together to plan and soon had a long list of topics we thought needed to be covered in order to provide solid foundations for the next steps in the journey. Because of our many other commitments we decided that instead of slaving over a hot set of studies for hours that we just didn't have, we'd believe that God could use who and what we were, and that we'd lead just from our lives and experiences. This was very freeing. In fact, I was so relaxed about the whole thing that at one stage I wondered if I should be worrying! It was unusual to be so free to enjoy the prospect of this new thing.

We were able to use a bach about an hour away— a reasonably short distance for travelling, yet far enough away to make it an adventure for the six young people, four girls and two boys, ranging from 12 to 19.

The word fun was also on the invitation and "bring your own music" and I did wonder about that. My idea of a retreat was getting into some 'deep stuff' and I hoped they would know that this was different from a camp – but it all worked very well.

The first evening session began after we'd settled in. We gathered round a small table, with a lit candle, and started off with two stories to relax everyone. (Thanks Ann Kiemel, you're an inspiration). We then asked everyone to find a place for themselves and to think about why they'd come, what they expected or hoped to get out of the weekend and what 'dreams' they had for their lives. We'd included a journal or notebook in the list of things to bring, and each one moved away from the central place and a deep, rich silence fell.

We gave only 10 minutes for the first time and then got together to share. As each one opened his or her heart so freely, I was very excited. They were very honest in their responses, some admitting to some pressure from parents as one reason for being there. They talked of the difficulties they were experiencing being Christians in their schools, and their feelings of inadequacy to explain their faith.

For one who was considering baptism it was obviously no light decision. Just what would following Jesus mean in her life? Was she willing to make that step? There was no pressure to contribute, but all did, willingly, deeply, even though for two of them it must have been harder because of older siblings present.

While lunch was cooking another story gave us fresh insights about God's ways of doing things. A walk on the beach and round the rocks combined the pleasures of being in the warm sunshine and the freshness of the sea air with the purposeful search for things we could collect for our God-place, our small central table – feathers, stones, discarded

crab shells, beautiful berries, leaves of amazing hues and other items which spoke to each one. The comments enlarged our picture of God and our knowledge of each other.

Meals were hassle-free with all the food prepared before hand by parents and the young people themselves. Plenty of snacks meant no one went hungry in between meals. Participants worked out a roster for the dishes which they kept to as only teenagers can. The old chocolate game provided a huge amount of fun – so I'm glad the word fun was in the programme.

The focus for our evening session was stones, set out on the floor among small candles. It began with a personal story leading on to examples of stones in the Bible, and how God had the people use them to mark special places and events, so that they would remember them. We asked the group to go away and to think about significant 'stones' in their own lives, people, places, events which were really meaningful to them, and to journal them. Again, the sharing was extensive and deep, and the hour was late.

Marie had written an excellent Examen of Conscience, in language well suited to this, or in fact, any age, calling it, 'Saying Goodnight to God'.

In the session after breakfast each of us talked about how and when we read the Bible, and what we get out of it. Marie then explained how putting yourself in the action can allow for greater discovery and we all left to consider Jesus walking on the water to the struggling men in the boat. It wasn't easy for the group to come to grips with this, though each had very worthwhile things to share. Marie's handling of this session, the way she affirmed and accepted and encouraged meant we all gained even though the original intention may not have been met. We'll try this again another time.

We were available for private conversations with anyone wanting that. While none of them specifically asked, we found informal settings, such as the walks provided good opportunities to get alongside individuals.

At the last session we invited reflection on the weekend, measuring it against expectations, again journaling their responses. In coming together for the last time, among other things, they all said they wanted to do the same thing again, and hoped it wouldn't be too long before they could. We stood together, held hands and each one prayed.

Special features of the retreat were the way each allowed others the freedom to speak openly and honestly. They looked with their eyes and listened with their hearts. Courtesy and respect allowed vulnerability. A fresh awareness grew that speaking out the questions, the doubts and fears, helps us see we're not alone, but that others understand and walk the paths which are different and the same. We shared understanding of those of us who came to N.Z. from other countries, of the aches of loneliness and the difficulties of adjusting to a new culture.

These were young people searching for their places in life, for how to hear from God, how to know their future direction, how to walk strongly, how to impact their friends. Rather than waiting months for another retreat we're exploring the idea of a monthly tea get-together, soup and pizzas, 5.30-7.30pm to continue to build on what was begun at the retreat. There'll be time for quiet reflection and sharing, and we'll invite others to speak on particular topics.

Retreats? Let's start them early!

AT THE END OF THE DAY - Saying Goodnight to God at a Youth Retreat

by Marie Ellis

Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to help you to see how your day has been from God's point of view. (If you are feeling down for some reason, God's way of seeing your day and your way of seeing it might be different).

Ask yourself:

- How has God gifted me today?
- What is there in this day to thank God for?
- How might God have enjoyed being with me in some of the day's activities?
- What activities/events were there where I was particularly aware of God being with me?
- Did I try anything new that I particularly want to talk to God about? Do so now.
- Anything worrying me that I need to deal with before going to sleep?
- Talk to God about it.
- Were there any difficulties or painful events today? Ask God for His special love and healing for this.

- Is there any area where I am aware that I deliberately did not please God? Ask for God's forgiveness. He is never mean or vindictive or small minded. See if there is anything else to do about this, e.g. speak with someone, do whatever you did not do, etc.

- Finally, ask God to help and guide you tomorrow, believing that He loves you very much, and always wants the best for you. Because he does love you!!

HILDEGARD: VISIONARY AND MYSTIC

by Danielle Melton

For five years now I have been involved in doing Theological Performances with a colleague, Ceridwyn Parr, on Hildegard of Bingen. In the understanding of mysticism as portrayed in the lives of Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross, all of who had an intense personal relationship with God, Hildegard seems quite different. It seems to me that her God-relationship came through visions and the descriptions she has left us of them.

"I am greatly troubled by this vision which has appeared to me through the inspiration of divine mystery..... the vision touches my heart like a burning flame."

These words Hildegard wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux in 1147 when she was 49 describing how she had seen visions since her early childhood. From her writings and the accounts of her personal scribe and mentor, the priest Volmar, Hildegard had thought up until that time that visions were a normal part of everyone's life! But she needed to be assured by someone "reputable" that they were authentic. Bernard obligingly did assure her that the visions were indeed of divine origin and this gave her the "permission" to launch her descriptions of them.

Visions were an accepted way of experiencing a close relationship with God at that time, so why was Hildegard unsure of her visions if they were part of the religious vocabulary? Perhaps the reason is that their content would have seemed much broader than the usual content. Hildegard's visions had deep and complex theological significance. They did not really describe her personal God-relationship, but rather her concern as the leader of an innovative women's community and a licensed preacher, to be a prophetic voice for the reform of the monastic orders, the proper behaviour of the clergy relationship between church and state, as well as advice on the individual path to God and individual morality. In the early stages, Hildegard was overwhelmed with the enormity and the implications of her mission as transmitted in her visions. Later, she demonstrates no lack of confidence in admonishing and interpreting to all manner of listeners. In a social climate which did not envisage women in any roles apart from those of wife, mother or alternatively as religious celibate, mystic writing by women was acceptable, provided the women were part of an established order and were perceived as orthodox. So the affirmation Hildegard received from Bernard moved her from being the passive visionary who simply receives a message from the divine, to the active and engaged prophet. This role was additional to her administrative responsibilities with one and then two convents, and the concomitant obligation of prayer, liturgy, construction of buildings, social work and pastoral care.

In Hildegard's social and religious context, visions were a normal method of expressing the experience of the divine, Women in convents wrote devotional literature based on their own experience, partly because they lacked a full academic education and partly because it was of more practical value for the other religious and lay people if they wrote liturgical dramas, biographies of the saints, letters of spiritual direction and personal testimonies. In other words, their writing was experiential and practical, rather than academic and intended for learned audiences.

In the 12th century there was a new spiritual emphasis within the Benedictine movement, led by St. Anselm a century earlier, which accentuated the desirability of an intense relationship with God. Although Hildegard did not seek the mystical unitive relationship, its acceptance in the language of the day provided an acceptable framework for her to build on. The new tradition reinforced the historical and biblical manifestation of God speaking through the weak and powerless, as with Samuel, Mary, Jesus or the disciples. Thus there is a tradition of divine wisdom being transmitted through an unexpected channel.

Hildegard described her visions to scribes and artists who recorded them. They are collected in her book called *Know the Ways of the Lord*. In them she was exploring the complex theological concepts of the Creator and creation, the Redeemer and redemption, and the history of salvation. Her vivid language was intended to help people understand their place in creation and the possibilities of a better world. The visions were a vehicle for Hildegard, giving her a divine compulsion to teach and write. Hildegard wished to establish the full glory of the church, which she represented as a battered and damaged woman. At the same time, she used powerful images for the divine and for the virtues, the first Christian writer to take seriously the feminine aspects of God.

So Hildegard is not your ordinary mystic as defined in our Winter 2000 edition Newsletter. She was indeed in love with her God and during a long and extraordinary full life (81 years) settled down to love and loving – as Borchet describes mysticism. Her writings, her buildings, her letters, her medicinal cures for all manner of ills, her enormous regard for restoring the health of the Church and perhaps above all her beautiful music in which she celebrated her love: these bear witness to a mystic of amazing gifts. Hildegard was, in my reckoning (a la Thomas Aquinas) the perfect blend of action and contemplation.

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Book Reviews

A CHURCHLESS FAITH

Faith journeys beyond evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic churches

by Alan Jamieson. Philip Garside Publishing 2000. pp189 \$29.95.

Reviewed by Jeannie Cochrane

When Alan Jamieson walked down the driveway to visit the first couple he was to interview for his doctoral thesis in sociology, he thought he knew what happens to the faith of those who leave the church. However, after talking with them for two and a half hours, he left feeling bewildered – these people did not fit his expectations. Alan went on to interview 108 leavers as well as 54 leaders from evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic (EPC) churches. He acknowledges having the unnerving experience of being forced to change his paradigms as a consequence of these conversations.

The results of Alan's research, as well as information gathered from the many other church leavers who have responded to articles and seminars on the findings of his thesis, form one component of this book. We are introduced to the leaver, the characteristics of the churches they leave, an understanding of the process by which they leave and the various patterns of their faith journeys. In the second part of the book Alan offers some resources for those who continue their journey outside the church, shares some thoughts on what churches need to do to stem the flow of leavers, suggests what may be the strengths and weaknesses of both churches and leavers and proposes some ongoing dialogue between the two groups.

I found this book very readable and informative. Although there is definitely an academic aspect to it, the inclusion of some of the leavers' thoughts, feelings and experiences along with portions of actual interviews ensures a very human feel to the book. I enjoyed the rather creative yet descriptive names for the categories of leavers – Disillusioned Followers, Reflective Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Integrated Wayfinders. (Who thinks up such names and how long does it take them?!) The use of tables which allow the reader to keep track of the characteristics of faith of each group of leavers as well as make comparisons between the groups is a helpful addition. I also appreciated his use of analogy – ocean liners, small ships, swimming beyond the rocks, demolishing and reconstructing houses are all used to help us more easily understand the processes he is describing.

One of the outstanding aspects of this book is the depth of understanding Alan Jamieson has gained about church leavers. By his own admission, this was not the case at the beginning of his research. He presents some statistics which some may find surprising and even alarming – for instance, the average time of involvement as adults in their EPC church was 15.8 years, 94% had held key leadership positions and 40% were involved in either full time Christian study or work or both. But deeper than this, I get the distinct impression that he has really come to grips with the forces which motivate people to begin the process of leaving what has often been "home" and an important part of their lives over a long period of time. He acknowledges the efforts made by leavers to fit in, conveys an understanding of the pain and struggle often experienced and realises the need for, and the wisdom of, their faith journeys being continued outside the institutional church.

Equally impressive is the advice he gives to both leavers and those who would like to leave but personal circumstances make this impossible - especially given his current role as a pastor of an EPC church! Among other resources he suggests linking up with a spiritual director, attending Taize or liturgical services and making retreats. He recognises that the journey at this stage will essentially be an inner one, requiring a different approach. Clearly Alan has the courage to be able to give priority to helping an individual nurture their faith journey even if that means they need to leave the kind of church he believes in enough to work for!

I believe this is a book which cannot be ignored. The incidence of those leaving what Alan calls the wide open back door of the EPC churches does not appear to be declining. The issues surrounding this need to be fully explored and addressed for the health of the faith community as a whole as well as its impact in the post modern age in which we live. A Churchless Faith offers an invaluable resource to facilitate this process. The leavers will find their journey validated, being reassured that they are in fact quite normal! Those in the churches they have left will find material to

help them understand the process undertaken by those who once worshipped alongside them and to constructively respond to others who are showing less enthusiasm about attending church. Members of churches outside the EPC network will gain a background knowledge of the issues being grappled with by leavers who may make use of some of the resources they have to offer. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to the perceptions of church leaders. Alan comments that one of the most disturbing results of his research was that the majority of those leading and pastoring EPC churches are ignorant of the crucial reasons why people leave the church. I suspect his own perceptions were able to change as a result of actually talking face to face with leavers with the kind of open mind and heart that is fundamental to research for a doctoral thesis. If leaders could approach this book with the same kind of openness and then begin to dialogue with leavers in a similar manner, the benefits to all could be quite substantial.

Alan's final plea for open channels of communication between church leadership and people who are considering leaving, and between church leavers and church leadership is a challenge to us all. This appears to be both the only way forward and a constructive, hopeful way forward where we can gain from each others strengths and build life giving communities of faith. The quote from Edwin Markham which Alan uses at the beginning of his final chapter is one for us all to take to heart:

They drew a circle that shut me out
 Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
 But love and I had the wit to win
 We drew a circle that took them in.

ENCOUNTERING THE STILL POINT ***A Practical Introduction to Christian Meditation***

By Phil Dyer

Reviewed by Glenda Prosser

To journey into this interior world within
 love must be awakened.
 For love to waken in us:
 Let go, let be.
 Be still in gentle peace,
 Be aware of opposites,
 Learn mindfulness and forgetfulness.

This quote from Teresa of Avila begins a wide-ranging exploration into the art of Christian meditation. Written by Phil Dyer, Vicar of Oxford-Cust in North Canterbury, *Encountering the Still Point* is an accessible introduction to types of meditative prayer and a contemplative lifestyle.

Encountering the Still Point is a very practical book. Each of its three parts introduces a different type of meditation (Reflective, Creative, and Contemplative) as identified by Peter Spink.

Part One (Contemplative Meditation) introduces the reader to the four stages of meditation; relaxing the body, focusing the mind, spiritual union, and reintegration. Using four Practicums, Phil assists the novice to prepare the body and mind for the discipline of Prayer of Quiet or Imageless Prayer. Commentaries accompanying the Practicums explain various aspects of Contemplative Meditation. These include: the benefits, stages, types and purpose of meditation, aids to meditation (such as the use of oils, music and ideas for creating a sacred space), journalling, and the use of breathing as a focusing tool. There is also a very useful section on the major hindrances to meditation and some hints on dealing with distractions. The final chapter of Part One looks at various methods of Active Meditation. The reader is introduced to a Walking Exercise, circle dancing, and hints for walking and making a Labyrinth.

Part Two (Reflective meditation) looks at methods which use the intellect such as Lectio Divina and Ignatian Prayer. Part Three (Creative meditation) introduces the use of the imagination and covers praying with icons, dreams, mandalas, dialogue prayer, and a brief look at herbalism as a "meeting place with God".

A feature of *Encountering the Still Point* is the interweaving of insights from both the Western and Eastern Orthodox branches of Christianity. The reader is introduced to snippets of the theology and praxis of Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, John Cassian, The Cloud of Unknowing, and The Way of a Pilgrim. The book also reflects the life and experience of the author, who lived with his family for four years in a Franciscan-based monastery in Arkansas, USA. Four coloured prints of icons "written" by the author, illustrate some of the concepts that Phil discusses.

Encountering the Still Point is well written, easy to read and intensely practical. It offers techniques which will assist individuals discover God "who is already there in the depths of all creation including your being". It also consistently points us back into the world. "A contemplative life that does not flow out into concern for the rest of creation holds the

seeds of quietism, an inward passivity of spirit that distorts the whole purpose of the contemplative experience." It does not leave the reader navel-gazing!

Encountering the Still Point is available from the author, Phil Dyer, 12 Church Street, Oxford, New Zealand. Price NZ\$20.00 (postage in NZ included).

THE GOD BEARING LIFE, THE ART OF SOUL TENDING FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

By Kenda Creasy Dean & Ron Foster - Upper Hutt Room Books 1999

Reviewed by John Heberton

In Luke's story of the Annunciation, the archangel had two messages for Mary; first that she was "beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out!" (Luke 1:28 The Message) and that she would bear God's son (she would be "the God bearer"). In "The Godbearing Life", Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster suggest that this encounter gives us a metaphor for ministry with young people today. Young people need adults to act as the archangel, to smuggle or bear God into their lives so that they too can hear for themselves God's message of affirmation and invitation to be Godbearers themselves.

What an energising and exciting way to view our encounters with young people. This book is like a breath of fresh wind. And it is for everyone, not just those involved with youth groups.

This book is written out of the authors' experience of being ministers in the United Methodist Church in the U.S.A. and in particular working with young people. It is born out of the challenges that young people have placed before them, to take them and their spiritual growth seriously. Out of that experience youth ministry has moved from being an exercise in giving young people knowledge about God, to a ministry of helping young people discern God in their lives. For both authors the emphasis has moved from programmes to asking, "what has been going on between you and God?" Now instead of doing things for young people, their ministry with young people has become one of tending the souls of young people.

Being a Godbearer, or a soul tender however is not something that one does lightly or easily. To be able to ask the question of others, you need first to be asking it of yourself. So this is not a book about youth ministry. It is a book about soul tending in a youth ministry context. It is about tending the souls of the readers and the souls of the young people the reader works with. It is a book about tending any and all souls.

This theme of Godbearing is explored in four parts. Each part can be read as a stand-alone section, or it can be read all at once. The four parts look at:

1. Section one explores the shift taking place in youth ministry from running programmes for young people to forming significant relationships with young people. They suggest that this shift changes both the identity and expectations of those working with young people, from the gung-ho programme leader, to be a Godbearer.
2. The second examines the goals of Godbearing youth ministry, where it takes place and who it involves.
3. The third section focuses on "the Godbearers". In it the authors explore the practices that draw us closer to God. They also explore the circle of people who help us in that, including soul friends, mentors and companions. This section is a good brief introduction to spiritual practices.
4. The last section applies these practices and relationships to ministry with young people. In particular it explores how young people can develop these practices, they need to draw close to God. And it explores the role of the adult Godbearer in developing these practices with young people.

This is not just a book that gives people information. The authors have set out to not just tell people about being Godbearers. They want to help people grow as Godbearers. So at the end of every chapter are questions and exercises which can be done either with a group or individually. It also has an activity to be done with other people working with young people, or by young people themselves. So, while an individual can read it, it is also laid out to be a great resource for groups to work through as well.

Some one once told me that young people didn't need spiritual directors, they needed discipleship. I never felt very comfortable about this, but wasn't sure how to counter such a view. In this book I found the counter. Young people need more than knowledge about God. They need to know God, and that requires Christian adults in their lives bearing God into their lives. Yes discipling is important, but so are all the practices of spiritual development, including spiritual direction. This places youth ministry back in the centre of the churches' mission rather than on the edge. While this book is written for the youth ministry context, what it has to say applies to any ministry with any age group. This book is easy to read and full of great insights. It is a good book to help anyone tend their own souls, so they may grow in their ministry of tending the souls of others.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE HEART

By James Finley, Notre Dame IN Sorin Books 2000. pp 220. \$40.00

Reviewed by Aileen Martin

In this scholarly yet personal work, James Finley invites the reader to enter the profundity of the ordinary in order to awaken to and surrender to "the godly nature of the present moment". Through the use of poetic language, particularly in the first four chapters the process of reading is also the process of contemplation.

In "Seeking a More Contemplative Way of Life" – chapter one, the seeker is invited "back into the intimate domain of our own experience of travelling along a path of everyday life in which everything appears to be nothing more than it appears to be, when suddenly, without warning, the ground beneath our feet is Mystery. The gossamer veil of appearances dissolves in the ever-so-subtle, ever-so-overwhelming realisation that the present moment is unexplainably more than it appears to be.

Such poetic language can help us to tap into our own contemplative experience, but when it is used to establish the theological and philosophical basis of meditation, it sometimes becomes wordy and obscure. However, it is then that Finley clarifies with excellent examples of his own personal and professional life.

The substantial core of the book is chapter five "Meditation". With precise instructions, Finley makes accessible to everyone the contemplative traditions and practices that once were thought of as the preserve of "religious". Now a clinical psychologist, Finley once spent five years as a Trappist monk in the Gethsemane monastery at Kentucky where he practised quiet meditation under the guidance of Thomas Merton. Both men shared an interest in the Buddhist tradition but Finley maintains that the contemplative experience is inherent in the God-human relationship, and not specifically in the Buddhist, Christian, or any other tradition.

The book of 219 pages divided into four parts and nine chapters is well written, but not light reading. I found it inspirational, beautiful, challenging and very rewarding. Both beginners and those more experienced with quiet meditation will find it of value, either as a resource to be mined in a leisurely way, or for insight to be found in Finley's theological, philosophical and psychological grounding.

UNION WITH CHRIST

John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard

Dennis E. Tamburello. Columbia Series In Reformed Theology. Westminster John Knox Press 1994. pp 167.

Reviewed by Andrew Dunn

It's great to see books now emerging that take the spirituality of the Reformers seriously. Dennis Tamburello's work, his doctoral thesis, has the added value that here is a Franciscan scholar examining Calvin's debt to Bernard of Clairvaux. He speaks of "the excitement of Calvin studies" and affirms the assistance of Bernard McGinn and others in doing his research. His work is part of a growing trend with Catholic scholars leading the way in fresh research that unearths the rich veins of spiritual wisdom from a watershed era for spirituality, as it was for biblical theology, national churches, vernacular worship and the nature of the church in the west.

Tamburello affirms that Calvin was fundamentally a biblical scholar seeking to expound biblical faith for the ordinary reader. Tamburello explores the many references in Calvin's writings to union with Christ under the topics of engrafting, communion, fellowship, in the Spirit, mysterious/incomprehensible, one flesh/spiritual marriage, spiritual union, mystical union, growing together, union with God, adoption, regeneration and partakers of Christ – the central themes in New Testament spirituality!

The writer looks at the Christian anthropology of both men, their theologies of justification and their understandings of mysticism and mystical union. All very stimulating stuff and a good way into the extensive writings of both.

He examines the origins of Calvin's mysticism and his rejection of much of the mystical trends of the day, and then focuses on the mystical language that Calvin does use, particularly mystical union with Christ. This entails a careful look at his use of this term, Bernard's own uses of it and weighs up carefully the two men's ways of describing the deep association of the believer with the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Tamburello has many comments about the value of both of these theologians and some important conclusions. How's this for starters: "My own participation in ecumenical studies has led me to the conclusion that spirituality... is a better

starting point than dogmatics for fruitful dialogue today" (109). Our experience on retreats is that the closer we all come to the foot of the cross the less important the great divisions between us seem! And this, "... both authors were ultimately concerned about the unity of the believer with God, rooted in faith and expressed primarily through love and service of God and others" (110).

They were both contemplative and contemporary!

FILM REVIEW

CHOCOLAT

Director: Lasse Hallstroem 2000 Miramax Films.

Reviewed by Stuart Vogel

Chocolat is a modern fable about a mysterious woman, Vianne, who appears in a small French town with her daughter and opens a chocolaterie, or a chocolate shop. The villagers have long been trapped in a narrow, rigid, pious religiosity and are controlled by the town's mayor. As they taste the delicious chocolate creations of the mysterious intruder, their lives and community are changed.

The film has many of the ingredients of the traditional fable, such as the opening words, "once upon a time" and the red riding hood coats that mother and daughter wear into town. This charming little fable or "short moral tale" has some quite delightful Christian insights. The north wind for example blows the pair into town to disrupt the ancient tranquillity of the village. At the end of the film, the south wind blows away the ashes of Vianne's mother who has dominated her even in death. Vianne, who has healed so many in the village, exorcises her own demons. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is the comforter as well as the disturber and the disrupter of our tranquillity.

In "real" life, chocolate is an ambiguous blessing. While it is delicious, it also adds the kilos. A cantankerous old woman, who is suffering from diabetes and refuses to go to a nursing home, undertakes "death by chocolate". In doing however, so she finds friendship through the chocolate shop and a place in which to connect again with her grandson. Comically, a couple, whose romance is long since dead, find renewed passion through bon-bons, which act like viagra on the husband.

Vianne opens her chocolaterie during Lent, which infuriates the mayor and the young priest. They are even more infuriated when she does not attend mass. The battle for souls of the villagers is nicely portrayed in the transformation of the physically abused and troubled Josephine, wife of the local bar keeper. Lena Olin, who plays Josephine, said "I really related to the fact that she is someone who has crossed the line, where she is looked on as an outsider, as someone who is a freak and weird and not normal" (quoted in the Christchurch Press, Feb 16 2001 P 16). Through Vianne, Josephine is offered a vision that her life need not be the way it is. Through the chocolate shop, she enters a communion with others at a depth which gives her resistance to resist, not chocolate, but the temptations of falling back into her old life. As she learns the art of making chocolate she is made whole. The chocolate shop becomes the true confessional and "church" in the village.

The pious mayor forces Josephine's husband Serge to undergo a rigorous and very funny series of exercises of penitence and contrition "to save the marriage". But as with all human attempts to gain salvation through our own pious efforts, Serge fails, relapses and in despair attacks Josephine and Vianne. The excesses of Calvinistic and Catholic piety are both exposed cleverly, in that the Village Church is supposedly Catholic, but looks in fact bare and Calvinistic. In the end the village's pious "tranquility", which is measured by abstinence, penitence and moral righteousness, gives way to life giving renewal and enjoyment of God's creation.

The mayor himself ends up sprawled out in the shop window of the Chocolaterie, having given into the power and temptation of chocolate. In a funny and poignant scene, Vianne offers the chocolate-splattered mayor a cup with an aspirin; like the communion cup. The mayor at his lowest point begins his own kind of resurrection and new life through grace. It is a nice touch in Chocolat that organised religion is not the domain of prudes, but is full of people waiting to find new life.

In the final scene, the villagers gather around the table in the chocolaterie making chocolate cakes, bon-bons, and hot cocoa with chilli-pepper. (On no account go to this film on an empty stomach). Vianne has been struggling with the call of the north wind to move on, but realises that she has a home at last at that table of people who have come to love her. The one who had served the village by bringing new life is now herself served by the people of that village. Her wanderings cease because she is home. Her daughter Anouk finds the courage to let go of her imaginary friend, the kangaroo in whom she projects herself when threatened. Now she accepts herself and confides in real people. The table in the chocolaterie can be seen as the communion table around which there is acceptance, laughter, love and life.

Chocolat is not the first film to use food to convey insights into community and perhaps Christian community in particular. *Babette's Feast* (1987) broke new ground in depicting the sumptuous feast around which the community

gathers and is transformed. As the Priest says in his sermon 'we measure goodness by what we create, embrace and include, rather than what we don't do, reject and condemn.'

SGM NEWS

With this first issue of our new Journal we are taking a significant step in offering, resources for spiritual growth, for living and working more contemplatively in our frenetic world. This year SGM is 20 years old! Yes, it's 20 years since the first retreat was held at Loiselles Beach near Gisborne after the formation of the Spiritual Growth Workgroup of the parish Development and Mission Department of the Presbyterian Church. Next year we will be celebrating our 21st and hope to announce later this year the plans for this.

We sense that now is the time to take a more deliberate step of change as we refocus ourselves and this work on resourcing for the growing Church in New Zealand and beyond. It's not that we will be lessening our interest in retreats and workshops on aspects of contemplative prayer and relationship with God but that with so many retreats being offered around the country we want to encourage these rather than compete. We think our efforts can best be focussed now on providing resources for retreats and encouragement for the spiritual life of the Christian community and beyond.

We have advertised for applications for the work of Coordinator of our Spiritual Directors' Training Programme and hope to make an appointment later in the year. Sr Mary Concannon steps down as Coordinator this year and Margaret Dunn is doing this work until the new appointment is made. Mary's work over the past 13 years has produced a fine training for spiritual directors that stands well beside anything offered around the world. We acknowledge her skills and dedication with the following Appreciation which we accepted at our meeting in March and trust that this time of rest will bring a marked improvement in her health. Mary continues working with us and with the training of spiritual directors and supervisors.

Minute of Appreciation

Sr Mary Concannon OP joined Spiritual Growth Ministries Workgroup in the mid 1980's as part of the second wave of new members, breaking new ground in ecumenical relationships.

When it became apparent that with the growing need for more directed retreats and for on-going spiritual direction there was an acute shortage of spiritual directors throughout New Zealand, SGM decided to launch a spiritual directors' training programme and appointed Mary in October 1987 to plan and implement such a programme.

Training modules were prepared by various members of the Workgroup and the initial intake of 10 people in 1988 was by invitation. In October 1990, through Mary's growing insight into the adequacy of the programme, training was expanded to two years, initially to expand the practical side of the training. This development also enabled an expansion of the academic side of the programme to the current six written modules and a research project. In 1990 the Training Manual was jointly copyrighted by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Dominican Leadership Team, a further significant relational development.

The Training Programme has grown from an intake of 10 in 1988 now averaging over 20 trainees per year over the last four years with a current total of 48 training in Year 1 and Year 2. This growth is due in no small part to Mary's strength, commitment and sacrifice.

This year with growing administrative demands of managing this expanding Programme and Mary's recurring ill health the Workgroup has taken the decision to reshape the Programme for the future and appoint a Co-ordinator to manage administration and to develop greater regional participation in training and resourcing trainers and supervisors.

As Mary leaves the Co-ordinator's role we give thanks to God for her energy, wisdom, vision, faith, cheerfulness and skills as a trainer and a spiritual director. We pray God's rich surprises in the unfolding of the way ahead as a new chapter begins to open for her.

SGM Workgroup. 12 March 2001.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Anna Johnstone lives in Glenfield on Auckland's North Shore and is a part-time tutor at MASTERS Institute in Mt Roskill training teachers. Anna is particularly interested in the creative use of people's gifts.

Aileen Martin rsm is a spiritual director, retreat director and workshop facilitator. She works from the Mercy Spiritual Life Centre, Epsom.

Danielle Melton OP lives in One Tree Hill, Auckland, and continues her interest in spiritual direction and retreat leading.

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Mary Simeon of Hamilton has contributed the artwork on the cover.

Warren Deason is minister of Albany Presbyterian Church on Auckland's North Shore, and is a spiritual director and the newest member of the SGM Workgroup.

Andrew Dunn lives at Albany where, with Margaret, he runs Oasis Retreat and Study Centre, and works as a retreat leader, director and supervisor and chairs the SGM Trust.

John Franklin, DMin, has been practising the ministries of spiritual direction, supervision and retreat leadership for twenty years. He works with several denominations teaching spiritual formation, preaching and communication, and works with his wife Trish in parish conflict resolution. He was co-founder of Spiritual Growth Ministries and is currently on the executive of The Association of Christian Spiritual Directors.

Helen Gray is from Timaru where Richard her husband is Minister of St Stephen's parish. Helen is a schools' guidance counsellor, a spiritual director and retreat leader and mother of three teenage children.

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