
CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE



Contemplation and Action

by Tom Ward

“The fruits of centering prayer are experienced not so much in the time of prayer as they are in our life in the world.”

This is the major premise of the fourth conference in the Centering Prayer Workshop as designed by Contemplative Outreach. As one who has been offering this Workshop quite often in the past twelve years, I always find this move a bit startling. The first three conferences focus on what goes on in our “inner room” as we close our eyes and return ever so gently to the sacred word whenever we notice that we are attached to thoughts of whatever kind. Then we begin the final conference with the sentence I quote above, moving from our inner room to our life in the world.

On further reflection, I know that this is a good and necessary move. We are not called to withdraw from the world. Quite the contrary: we are called to a life of service. For we all know the double commandment: love God with all that you are and all that you have; love your neighbor as you love yourself. Over time we see that our prayer is a way of obeying this commandment, putting our loves in order, loving God first and then, through this love, loving our neighbor in “minute particular”, as the poet William Blake never tired of writing. Or as

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Finding Nothing in Prayer

by Jennifer Michael

*Amazing to believe that nothingness
Surrounds us with delight and lets us be...
---Mark Jarman, “Unholy Sonnet 4”*

For the first several years of my Centering Prayer practice, I struggled with the feeling of *nothing*. I sensed that other people had wonderfully consoling experiences during their sits, and while Keating assures us that such experiences are not the purpose, it was easy for me to feel left out. Granted, there were moments of deep peace that sometimes bordered on a felt presence of God, but they were fleeting, and left me even hungrier for that presence.

Something, of course, must have continued to draw me to the practice, even if my conscious mind couldn’t name it. The frustration of God’s apparent absence intensified on a series of eight-day retreats. During one of these, I told one of my spiritual mentors, “I feel as though I’m stepping into a void.” He replied, “But that’s where God is.” At the time, I was less than reassured. Did I trust such a God? Did I want to go there? After all, I associated emptiness with pain, longing, lack of meaning. Wasn’t prayer supposed to counteract those sources of suffering?

Gradually, though, two things have happened for me. One is that I have come to perceive the “void” as welcoming and embracing—“surround[ing]” us with delight,” as in Jarman’s lovely poem. Students with whom I read the poem often initially assume that Jarman is denying God’s existence. On the contrary, he is joining in the ancient apophatic tradition, the *via negativa*, that places God beyond conscious knowing, beyond names, beyond things. Hence God is *no thing*. The second part of my journey has been exploring some of the ancient as well as contemporary expressions of this no-thing-ness.

The fifth- or sixth-century writer known as Pseudo-Dionysius is the source for the idea of the “darkness of God,” a notion repeated in the Middle Ages by the *Cloud of Unknowing* and John of the Cross and in

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From the editor

Our 16th Annual United in Prayer Day will be held Saturday, March 15, 2008 at **St. George's Episcopal Church**, 4715 Harding Road. The video for the day includes presentations by Father Richard Rohr and Father Thomas Keating at the Contemplative Outreach 2007 Annual Conference held in Houston, Texas. Join us in uniting with the worldwide network of Contemplative Outreach in a single bond of Centering Prayer around the globe. This year's theme is "**A Taste of Beauty, Truth & Goodness.**" To register, please contact Carnnie Harmon. Contact information is listed below.

* * *

Mark your calendars for the **2nd Annual Gathering of Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee** on **August 16** to be held at **Christ the King Church** on Belmont Boulevard in Nashville, TN.

* * *

On Saturday, January 19 a **Facilitator's Luncheon** was held at Arden Place in Nashville, TN. Over 20 centering prayer support group facilitators attended to share experiences and resources and to pray together. Facilitators came from Knoxville, Murfreesboro, Clarksville, Brentwood, Franklin, Dickson, Antioch, Nashville, and Sewanee.

* * *

Please take a look at our *new web site*: www.centeringprayermidtn.com. We welcome news and/or articles from you or your centering prayer group.

* * *

If *your church or group* would like to host a **Centering Prayer Workshop**, please contact me or one of the Contacts on our web site.

Carnnie Harmon, 615-834-1259
E-mail: AssocMercy@aol.com
52 Benzing Road, Antioch, TN 37013

CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION *continued from page 1*

Teresa of Avila put it, "This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works." (*The Way of Perfection*)

For those of us who have been called to centering prayer, the first task is to develop our practice at least to the basic minimum of twenty minutes twice a day. But some time in our journey (and perhaps before we have attained that basic minimum), we will most likely discern a need for a further practice to foster our fidelity in daily life. The Active Prayer Sentence is the first such practice that many of us discover. (See p. 112 in the older edition of *Open Mind, Open Heart*; p. 171, in the revised edition.) This practice helps us in moving from prayer to action.

Over the years Contemplative Outreach has developed other such practices—from the Welcoming Prayer, to the Process of Forgiveness, to a workshop on Lectio Divina. We are pleased that these practices will be taught in various workshops throughout the coming year at St. Mary's Sewanee. You will find them listed on the back cover of this newsletter. I look forward to participating in all of them myself, and I hope that many of you will be there as well.

We are called to manifest the fruits of the Spirit in our daily lives. Paul names some of those fruits in Galatians 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control), and Jesus holds some others before us in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5-7.) Our prayer empowers our service; our service necessitates our prayer. Active prayer practices help to move us from prayer to action. ⊕



Contemplative Prayer Session
at St. Mary's Sewanee

National Contemplative Outreach Leaders Coming to St. Mary's Sewanee



Fr. Carl Arico

Fr. Carl Arico, Vice-President of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., will lead a Lenten Retreat entitled: **The Process of Forgiveness**. We will hear how forgiveness at its core is a divine gift of love. A **Clergy Enrichment** retreat will follow on March 10 and 11.

Cathy McCarthy, Coordinator for Contemplative Outreach of Orange County New York, and **Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler**, President and CEO of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., will offer an in-depth introduction, review, and immersion into the **Welcoming Prayer** practice on April 6-10.

For more information on this and all the centering prayer retreats, please visit www.StMarysSewanee.org, www.centeringprayermidth.com.



Cathy McCarthy



Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler

Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler will lead a **Presenter Formation** which provides training and practice in interiorizing and communicating the essential elements of an Introductory Workshop on Centering Prayer. This workshop also offers an opportunity to look at one's own Centering Prayer practice in light of the Essentials. This Formation will be conducted May 12-18. Prior attendance at an 8-10 day centering prayer retreat is required for this Formation.

On October 19-21, **Sr. Maria Tasto**, formerly a resource faculty member of Contemplative Outreach will lead a **Lectio Divina** retreat. Sr. Maria will follow the retreat with a **Formation for Presenters** of Lectio Divina Workshops on the afternoon of October 21. Sister assisted in the formation of the original **Lectio Divina** workshop and has trained presenters for many years.



Sr. Maria Tasto

We are grateful to these leaders who have been so instrumental in teaching Contemplative Prayer and supporting centering prayer groups around the world.

You may register for these programs using the Registration Form on the back cover of this newsletter.

Wherever I Go

by John Denson

Leaves fallen from a summer hackberry laid crushed among cigarette butts and dirt from the soles of countless feet, in their sandals and their boots. A mockingbird, curious, perched on the empty, plastic chair aside me, waiting to see if perhaps the sandwich just brought to my little, black table was for him or for me. A college girl, prim, brown tee shirt, owl-ish glasses, hair pulled back, studied her laptop intently.

A white guy all in black, head shaved, earrings, and a laptop, came by, asked to "borrow a light." I've borrowed lights, never returned them. The breeze picked up, a leaf fell, and the mockingbird took off. This was August.

In September I spent a few days at a Center-

ing Prayer retreat at a convent. We were quiet the whole time, silent, in fact. Had I known we would be that still that long I would not have gone. Now I can't wait to go to another - the simplicity of it all lingering such that a spiritual shift lifted me in a way no drug ever could, or would.

The people at the retreat, a varied (and quiet) group, would sit, maybe pray, maybe breathe, until the group leader's tiny brass bell rang - always twenty minutes later. We would then rise from our chair or the floor and (quietly) file out of the makeshift chapel, and off to our rooms, or to sit and read, or to walk. Not until the retreat was over and I drove away did I understand. ⊕

the twentieth century by T. S. Eliot. Pseudo-Dionysius advises his friend Timothy to “leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge.”²

Or, as Eliot says, in a loose paraphrase of John of the Cross,

*In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are
not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of
ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you
know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.*³

All very interesting poetry, you may say, but how does this translate into the lived experience of a real practitioner?

About a year ago, on an eight-day retreat, I began to get a glimpse of what these writers were saying: that is, a glimpse of nothing. Previous retreats had been emotionally stormy, with a perceptible descent into darkness and a commensurate resurgence of joy. This time, none of that was happening. If there was darkness, it was not the darkness of afflictive emotions, but the mere intangibility of God. I simply felt *nothing*. Then I realized that perhaps that “nothing” was God. And the more I relaxed into this “void,” the more welcoming it felt. After all, the void is not outside me, at the address where I expect God to be.

Rather, it is the still point within: it is the place of what Keating calls the Divine Indwelling, in which “we live and move and have our being.” I know of no better practice than Centering Prayer to help us approach this point. The way to get there is to unlearn what we know, to dispossess what we possess, to be where we (in our usual self-consciousness) are not. ⊕

¹ Mark Jarman, *Questions for Ecclesiastes* (Story Line Press, 1997).

² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987), p. 135.

³ T. S. Eliot, “East Coker,” from *Four Quartets* (Harvest Books, 1968).

Centering Prayer Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

The Welcoming Prayer Method

Notice and sink into the feelings, emotions, thoughts, sensations, and commentaries in your body.

Welcome the divine indwelling in the feelings, emotions, thoughts, commentaries, or sensations in your body by saying “**Welcome.**”

Let go by repeating the following sentences:
“I let go of the desire for security, affection, control.”
“I let go of the desire to change this situation.”

For additional resources:
www.centeringprayer.com
www.centeringprayermidtn.com
www.StMarysSewanee.org

MIDDLE TENNESSEE SUPPORT GROUPS

Nashville	Christ Church	Stephen Miller	615-298-3381	Sun 10:00 am
Nashville	Christ Church	Rev. Geoffrey Butcher	615-255-7729	Tue 5:30 pm
Nashville	Christ Church	Marion Arnold	615-352-7660	Thurs 12:15 pm
Nashville	St. George's	Bets Ramsey	615-385-2150	Mon 4:45 to 6:15 pm
Nashville	South Minister Presbyterian	Helen Blakely	615-331-3652	Wed 11:30 am
Nashville	Christ the King	Carolyn Goddard	615-665-1197	Fri 8:00 am
Nashville	West End United Methodist	Leigh Pandaleon	615-279-3708	Mon 12:00 Noon
Antioch	St. Ignatius	Carnnie Harmon	615-834-1259	Fri 9:00 am
Antioch	St. Mark's	Gretchen Miller	615-794-6720	Sat 8:00 am
Brentwood	Holy Family Catholic Church	Irene Neilan	615-371-1015	Mon 7:45 pm-8:15 pm
Clarksville	Immaculate Conception	Dr. Ron Oakland & Judy Whelan	931-217-1292 931-216-3863	Wed 5:00 pm Wed 5:00 pm
Gallatin	Our Saviour Episcopal Church	Church Office	615-452-7146	Sun 4:00 pm
Johnson City	St. John's Episcopal Church	Frances Jackson	423-434-0506	Tue 6:00 to 7:00 pm
Murfreesboro	St. Rose	Kay Curtis & Patricia Darrell	615-848-3081 615-896-2742	Mon 7:30 pm Mon 7:30 pm
Sewanee	Otey Parish	Jennifer Michael	931-598-5094	Mon 7:00 pm
Sewanee	St. Mary's Retreat Center	Rev. Tom Ward	931-598-5342	Tue 4:00 pm
Chattanooga	Grace Church	Kathy Russell	423-517-0645	Thur 5:00 pm-6:30 pm
Chattanooga	Good Shepherd	Rev. Margaret C. Marshall	423-821-1583	Sun 9 am/Wed 4:30 pm
Knoxville	St. John's Cathedral	Rev. Canon Tom Rasnik	865-525-7374	Tue 5:30 pm-6:15 pm
Knoxville	John XXIII Student Center	Beverly Froning	865-426-4411	Mon 7:00 pm
Knoxville	Lakeview Center	Barbara Haning	865-671-0766	Thur 6:30 pm-7:45 pm
Kodak	Home Residence	Ed Coleman	865-932-4431	Wed 6:00 pm
Oak Ridge	Home Residence	Janice Watkins	865-481-3326	Mon 7:15 pm
Saturday "Morning of Silence"				
Antioch	1st Saturday at St. Mark's	Gretchen Miller	615-794-6720	Sat 9:30 -12:00 Noon

Return

by Carolyn Goddard

Living outside the garden
there is shame,
desire, dominance.

The curse of thorns and thistles—
seeking security in relationships and work—
leaves a dry taste of dust.

Ah, but there is a secret!
The cherubim are not posted
to keep you out - only
to keep I out.

The essential you
the you under the I,
is protected forever,
undefiled and undefilable.

You can return
for you never left. ⊕

Lectio Divina Class to Begin at Christ the King

A new class on Lectio Divina has begun at Christ the King Catholic Church on Belmont Boulevard in Nashville, Tennessee. The class is being led by Carolyn Goddard, a presenter with Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee. Class times are Thursday mornings from 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM. All are welcome. Prior experience with Lectio is not necessary. For additional information and directions, please call Carolyn at 615 438-3216.



Desert Mothers & Fathers by Lee Mitchell

2008 CENTERING PRAYER EVENTS AT ST. MARY'S SEWANEE

www.centeringprayermidtn.com or www.StMarysSewanee.org

DATE	RETREATS	COST/DEPOSIT	PRESENTER(S)
Mar 7-9	Lenten: the Process of Forgiveness	\$250/\$50	Fr. Carl Arico
Mar 10-11	Clergy Enrichment	\$150/\$50	Fr. Carl Arico
Apr 6-10	Welcoming Prayer Immersion	\$425/\$50	Cathy McCarthy/Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler
Apr 20-22	3 Day Retreat	\$225/\$50	Rev. Margaret Marshall
May 12-18	Presenter Formation	\$650/\$50	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler
May 31	Introductory Workshop	\$35	Rev. Tom Ward
Jun 1-8	8 Day Retreat	\$575/\$50	Rev. Tom Ward
Sept 21-23	3 Day Retreat	\$225/\$50	Rev. Geoffrey Butcher
Oct 19-21	Lectio Divina Retreat	\$250/\$50	Sr. Maria Tasto
Oct 21	Presenter Formation-Lectio	\$35	Sr. Maria Tasto
Nov 16-20	5 Day Retreat	\$375/\$50	Rev. Doug Schwert
Dec 12-14	Advent Retreat	\$225/\$50	Rev. Tom Ward

To Register, please Circle Desired Retreat(s) and please Print Carefully

Name: _____ Phone(s): _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Email: _____ Special Needs: _____

Included is Deposit \$ _____ Donation \$ _____ Total Payment \$ _____

Mail to: ***Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee, 1103 Tynne Blvd., Nashville, TN 37220***

Additional information: Carol Wray (615) 373-0613 or email: carolwray@aol.com or

St. Mary's Sewanee (931) 598-5342 or email: StMarysSewanee@bellsouth.net

For information about retreats in Alabama, Georgia and Kentucky: www.contemplativeoutreach.org

- Fr. Thomas Keating

"global community"

to the

Divine Love

the experience of

aims to transmit

Outreach

"Contemplative"



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