



**MINISTRY UNPLUGGED AND RESTRUNG**  
***Making wine a sacrament ~ interior practice for ministry in the world***

**A case for the inclusion of the history and practice of contemplative prayer  
in the formation of ministers in the PCANZ**

**Study Leave Report  
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## Objectives Method and Definition of Terms

My objective for this study leave was to construct a case for including the history and practice of contemplative prayer in the formation of ordained ministers in the PCANZ in order to encourage

- healthy and sacramental use of time<sup>1</sup>
- mature self understanding
- continuing spiritual formation and
- active commitment to living out the Gospel of Shalom in the world

To accomplish this I completed:

- an exploration of the works of ancient and contemporary exponents of Contemplative Prayer
- a pilgrimage to three Christian communities in which the practice of Contemplative Prayer is central to living together and transforming society. [Taizé in France, Iona in Scotland, and a ten day intensive on Centering Prayer at St Benedict's Monastery Snowmass, Colorado]
- a search for existing seminaries already including the history and practice of Contemplative Prayer in their curricula

### Definition of terms

For the purposes of this report:

‘Contemplative Prayer’ means the Christian practice of resting in silent communion with God.<sup>2</sup>

‘Centering Prayer’ refers to a contemporary method developed to introduce people to the practice of contemplative prayer.

‘Meditation’ refers to all forms of prayer focused on an object for reflection, i.e. *Meditatio: Lectio Divina* the meditation on Holy Scripture, the repetition of an object word like *maranatha*. Forms of Christian meditation particularly meditation on Holy Scripture are an important precursor to the practice of contemplative prayer.<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

2 Cor 3: 17-18

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (NIV)*

Over the past eight years in parish ministry I've become convinced that my calling and commitment to contemplative prayer is the primary source of ongoing energy, inspiration and satisfaction in my ministry.

It is my experience that the disciplined practice of contemplative prayer provides not only opportunity for increased intimacy with God, but daily time and space in an attitude of consent and surrender in which I rest, refocus, and recharge my batteries during which God works to transform my life.

I observe that many of my brothers and sisters in ministry continue to be unknowingly driven, not by the model of Jesus who frequently went off by himself to a quiet place, but by cultural and familial programmes for approval and security. Consequently many feel haggard and victimised by the considerable demands of ministry and some are forced to take time off to recover from burn out or leave ministry in despair and disappointment.

Today our theological and ministry formation in the PCANZ is in my view outstanding. However, it's my observation that while our ministers have a well integrated intellectual appreciation of the faith, they may lack the disciplines for developing an ever deeper intimacy with God that transforms the whole person. They have little or no familiarity with what the ancient church used to call 'the three Vias'. [*via purgativa, via illuminativa, and via unitiva.*]<sup>4</sup>

This is why I've come to the conclusion that any curriculum for ministry formation which does not have a place for the history and practice of contemplative prayer is incomplete and inadequate.

In holding this view it seems incumbent on me to make my case and offer my services in developing an appropriate curriculum for teaching the history and practice of contemplative prayer to those in training and to those already in active ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Just as I finished writing a work appeared which excellently summarises the case I have been trying to build from scratch. It is David Keller's *BINDING HEAD AND HEART: A conversation concerning theological education: The Contemplative Ministry Project* in Chapters 5 and 6 of KEATING, T. (2008). *Spirituality, contemplation, & transformation: writings on centering prayer*. New York, Lantern Books.

I include a copy of this book as a gift to the Knox Centre.

With the deepest respect

The Rev Diane Gilliam-Weeks

### **Gospel roots of contemplative prayer**

*"Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."* [Mt. 6:6, *The Message*]

The call to Christian Contemplative Prayer is grounded in Holy Scripture. 'In response to Jesus' call for personal transformation, contemplative prayer is a grace-filled attentiveness to God that initiates and sustains a change of consciousness, leading to deepening love of God and neighbour.'<sup>5</sup> In any case it was Jesus' habit to seek solitude and quiet in order to recharge his batteries and communicate with the one he called 'Abba'.

The call to contemplative prayer is expressed in Jesus' wisdom sayings in the Sermon on the Mount: '...But when you pray go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.' Mt. 6:6. Here, Jesus taught that *self-centredness* is at the heart of human sin and despair. True happiness is to be found in living the values expressed in the Beatitudes – letting go of pleasure and power as primary objectives in life.

Jesus urges us to let go of anything that gets in the way of our ability to live the way of Shalom even if it's as painful as pulling out an eye or cutting off a foot.<sup>6</sup> Even more challenging to our cultural values is that Jesus calls us to dis-identify with family, ethnic group or national loyalties if our love for them prevents us from following the Gospel.

Jesus' call to repent does not mean 'take a guilt trip', but 'change the direction in which you are looking for happiness.' Turn away from material, emotional, intellectual, social, religious and even spiritual<sup>7</sup> targets/idols as sources for happiness and turn toward God and 'the way of Shalom'.

Jesus instruction to turn the other cheek implies the freedom not to react compulsively, but to respond out of reason and faith – to do what divine love would do.

In his letters to the early churches Paul uses the word *gnosis* when talking about the knowledge of God appropriate to those who love God.<sup>8</sup> He did not mean secret knowledge available only to the few but the intimacy with God that can be gained from discipline spiritual practice.<sup>9</sup>

'Contemplative prayer is an opportunity for the mind and the heart to be joined in that inner place where God is uniquely present to every human being. In that "inner room" as Jesus reminded us we experience unconditional love and listen to God's desires for our lives and for the world.'<sup>10</sup> It is the contention of Christian Contemplatives that we find our true identities in that "inner room".

### Contemplative Prayer in Christian history

"This is what you are to do: lift your heart up to the Lord, with a gentle stirring of love desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts." The Cloud of Unknowing.<sup>11</sup>

The history of the pre-reformation church is our heritage too.

In the Christian tradition contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God.

'It is the opening of the mind and heart – our whole being to God, the ultimate mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself.'

Along with *Lectio Divina*, contemplative prayer was assumed to be a necessary Christian discipline until the end of the fifteenth century.

Early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa combined the neo-platonic word *theoria* [the supreme activity of the person of wisdom.] with the Hebrew *Da'ath* [experiential knowledge that comes through love] into the Latin *contemplatio* – 'the knowledge of God impregnated with love' which is a gift of God which enables us to rest body mind and spirit in the presence of God. Not utter inactivity, but purposeful and sustained attention to God.

Merton reminds us, 'the Desert Fathers did not imagine themselves to be mystics, though in fact they often were. They were careful not to go looking for extraordinary experience and contented themselves with the struggle for purity of heart and for control of their thoughts, to keep their minds and hearts empty of care and concern, so they might altogether forget themselves and apply themselves entirely to the love and service of God...'<sup>12</sup>

The function of image, symbol, poetry, music, chant and ritual has always been to orient all our senses to God. Yet, for the ancients meditation was above all *meditatio scripturarum* ...memorising and repeating the words of scripture particularly the psalms and the prophets until they were ingrained on the heart, or 'invoking the name of Christ with profound attention in the very ground of one's being.. [as] Macarius said: there is no other perfect meditation than the saving and blessed Name of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling without interruption in you...'<sup>13</sup>

Here we can see the essential simplicity of the practice of contemplative prayer as a progression from meditating on or internalising scripture, the humble invocation of the name of Jesus leading to the 'the prayer of the heart' and the willing abandonment of all distracting thoughts as one rests in the presence of God in surrender to whatever God may want to do with us. This 'practice of the presence of God' was made the cornerstone of monastic life in the Rule of St Benedict and the seminal work for many contemplatives, the anonymously written *Cloud of Unknowing*<sup>14</sup>.

But it's important to remember that the contemplative way of life was never meant to elevate its practitioners above other Christians by initiating them into a realm of esoteric knowledge and experience and delivering them from the ordinary struggles and sufferings of human existence.

The practice of contemplation is never a 'subtle escape from the Christian economy of incarnation and redemption; it is a special way of following Christ, of sharing in his passion and resurrection and in his redemption of the world.'<sup>15</sup>

In fact every contemplative will report that the dimensions of prayer in solitude are filled not only with consolation but with anguish, self-searching, and revulsion at our own vanity, falsity and capacity for betrayal.

Far from establishing us in 'unassailable narcissistic security, the way of prayer brings us face to face with the sham and indignity of our false [fallen] self that seeks to live for itself alone and to enjoy the "consolation of prayer" for its own sake'.<sup>16</sup>

The Christian spiritual journey with Christ toward union with God is marked out in stages familiar to anyone on it. These were first outlined in Athanasius' Life of Anthony. But, the purgative side of contemplation is most famously described by John O' the Cross in *The Dark Night of the Soul*.<sup>17</sup> 'Direct exposure to supernatural light darkens the mind and heart...as one passes from meditation, in the sense of active "mental prayer," to contemplation, or a deeper and simpler intuitive form of receptivity, in which if one can be said to meditate at all, one does so only by receiving the light with passive and loving attention.'<sup>18</sup>

Peter of Celles, another Benedictine witness of the twelfth century describes the ‘Sabbath’ of contemplation in which the soul rests in God and God works in the soul...the result of the labours of repentance, temperance and self-denial.

Theologically, the unitive knowledge of God in love is not a: ‘knowledge of an object by a subject, but a far different and transcendent kind of knowledge in which the created “self” which we are seems to disappear in God and to know’ God alone.<sup>19</sup>

In this every contemplative warns against trying to attain union with God by trying to conjure up images of such experiences in our imaginations particularly in a ‘climate of egocentricity and false mysticism’. In fact the fruits of genuine religious experience are universally among contemplatives lauded as a pure gift from God.<sup>20</sup>

It is argument of Christian contemplatives throughout history that ‘our knowledge of God is paradoxically a knowledge not of God as the object of our scrutiny, but of ourselves as utterly dependent on Gods saving and merciful knowledge of us. It is in proportion as we are known to him that we find our real being and identity in Christ.’<sup>21</sup>

## Contemporary approaches to contemplative prayer

### Thomas Merton and the first wave

Before the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the contemplative tradition in Christianity was kept alive primarily in monasteries. In the past fifty years, as internal and external challenges to Christianity have grown, so too has interest in contemplative spirituality.

It's fair to say that in the 60s, Trappist Monk Thomas Merton was largely responsible for what could be called a 'first wave in the renewal of contemplative Christianity'<sup>22</sup>. Merton's books and poems and political activism resonated with many Christians inside and outside the cloister, as well as those with no previous religious involvement.

Of contemplation Merton writes:

'Contemplation is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy. And yet in a certain sense, we must truly begin to hear God when we have ceased to listen... We wait on the Word of God in silence, and when we are 'answered' it is not so much by a word that bursts into our silence. It is by the silence itself suddenly inexplicably revealing itself to us as a word of great power, full of the voice of God.'<sup>23</sup>

Two themes emerge in Merton's contemporary take on contemplation. His first theme was the practice of incarnational contemplation which aims to integrate the graces gained in contemplation with all of human life: in the church, in the community, and in the arena of public policy. Instead of shutting ourselves off the contemplative life leads to involvement with the world in love arising from prayer. Social justice, peace, artistic expression, interreligious dialogue, relating to creation, relationships and community become action arising from contemplative prayer.

Merton warns, 'we must not take a purely quietist view of contemplative prayer. Without the element of incarnational engagement in the world, a person is not alone with God, but alone with himself. He is not in the present of the Transcendent One, but of an idol... his own complacent identity. He becomes immersed and lost in himself, in a state of inert, primitive and infantile narcissism.'

Contemplation is not mere negation. Nor can a person become a contemplative merely by blacking out sensible realities and remaining alone with himself in darkness. First of all, one who does this... simply enters into an artificial darkness of his own making.<sup>24</sup>

Next in order to communicate the benefits of contemplative living in today's world Merton brought together the language of psychology and theology to describe the human condition and its psychological limitations with God.

Once Merton and others had brought the message and meaning of contemplation to the surface of wider Christian practice again, there was a need for a system of practice and support so those who did not live in monasteries could pursue the Christian contemplative journey.<sup>25</sup> This became the second wave of incarnational contemplation.

### Centering Prayer and the second wave

While I discovered my contemplative calling through *The Cloud of Unknowing*, my exploration of contemporary methods has been into Centering Prayer. The centering prayer movement is a global manifestation of the contemplative revival of the Christian gospel. It is part of the remarkable shift that has taken place as the modernist era died and post-modern era arrived once again legitimising the pursuit of spirituality.<sup>26</sup>

What distinguishes the movement from other contemporary expressions of spirituality is its grounding in the Christian tradition and the institutional church. I have met many people who have become part of this movement after exploring Eastern forms.

The source of centering prayer, as in all methods leading to contemplative prayer is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Centering prayer is taught as a way to develop in those unfamiliar with contemplation, the receptiveness to the divine gift of contemplative prayer where one is able to rest in silence in the presence of God. This way of praying moves us beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him.



The contemporary form of centering prayer was discovered, initially taught, and developed after the Second Vatican Council's call for spiritual renewal in the Catholic Church. Its most well known exponent, Fr Thomas Keating, had also observed that young Catholics were leaving the Church in droves to join Hindu ashrams and Buddhist sanghas.

In 1971 invoking the spirit of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI declared that unless the Church rediscovered the contemplative tradition, renewal couldn't take place. He specifically called on monastics like Keating to lead the way, because they already lived the contemplative life. The Pope challenged them to develop a way to help lay people and those in other religious orders to bring the contemplative dimension into their lives as well.

Keating heard the call and was determined to make a contribution. He asked the monks at St. Joseph's where he was Abbot, to search for a method rooted in Christian tradition that would make contemplative prayer more accessible to those outside the monastery.

St. Joseph's novice master, William Meninger, found a simple technique in the 14th-century classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>28</sup> Meninger called the method "The Prayer of the Cloud" and began teaching it to retreatants at the abbey guesthouse.

Another St. Joseph monk, Basil Pennington, began teaching it to religious men and women. At the very first workshop given to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Pennington frequently quoted his friend and correspondent Thomas Merton, who often when writing about this type of prayer, would use the term "centre."<sup>29</sup> By the end of the workshop, participants were referring to the technique as "centering prayer."

Keating explains, 'Centering Prayer restates in contemporary terms the apophatic tradition of the desert fathers and mothers, Pseudo-Dionysius, the Hesychasts of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and significant elements from Saint John of the Cross, especially his teaching on the dark nights of the sense and spirit and his lengthy advice for the passage from discursive meditation (devout reflections) to contemplation.'<sup>30</sup>

Today the practice of centering prayer draws thousands of Catholics and Protestants to workshops and retreats like the ten day intensive I attended at St Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado where Keating now resides. The retreats are so popular with church leaders they're filled a year in advance.<sup>31</sup> A schedule for the intensive I attended during this study leave is included as Appendix I of this report.

### **Centering prayer and science in dialogue**

While clearly a special blend of Christian teaching, Centering Prayer is taught in conversation with contemporary psychology's understanding of the stages of human development, the existence of the unconscious and as well as insights of sciences like quantum mechanics and the 'new physics'.<sup>32</sup>

The language used enables Centering Prayer to be understood not only as a spiritual discipline but also as a way to reduce everyday obstacles to stillness before God: especially the tendency to over-work, or over-intellectualise, and depend too much on concepts in our efforts to approach God.<sup>33</sup>

Keating says, 'There is nothing wrong with our old ways of prayer, they are just inadequate for the ever-deepening relationship with God' that expands as we grow in humility, self-knowledge and divine love.<sup>34</sup>

On the third Sunday in Advent in my first sermon after returning from Study Leave I explained the psychological blocks to experiencing the peace of God. The jumping off point was the lectionary reading from Philippians 4. The text of this sermon is included as Appendix II.

### **The benefits of Centering Prayer.**

The spiritual, relational, psychological and neurological benefits of Centering Prayer are principally experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.

Keating remarks, 'of course, one's psychological experience of centering prayer varies from day to day. It can be very consoling. It can also be emotionally difficult, 'because when psychological rest occurs-when the body rests, the emotions rest, and the spirit rests-the body, which is the warehouse of undigested emotional material, begins to feel permission to evacuate primitive experiences, especially of early childhood.'<sup>35</sup>

These 'take the form of thoughts or emotions that bear no relation to the present. The object of centering prayer is not to get rid of these thoughts; it is to let them come, then to let them go. That is the way the psyche gets rid of undigested material: by bringing it to our awareness. If we just acknowledge the thoughts and feelings, they normally disappear. When these feeling surface practitioners encourage what has become known as the Welcoming Prayer.<sup>36</sup>

However, normally in centering prayer, the priority is to be as silent as possible, and when that is not possible sitting with the feelings for a while without analyzing them. 'During prayer is not the time to get into analysis,' Keating says, 'because you might lose your grounding and confidence in God.'<sup>37</sup>

During an intensive where one might be practicing centering prayer for up to three hours a day, 'beginners [those in the first 10 years of practice] have some dramatic unloading. Their dream patterns change dramatically and so on.'

In centering prayer, you let go of any perception when it catches hold of your attention. You constantly let go by returning to the sacred word. At some point the will begins to habitually turn to God during the prayer; it doesn't need a sacred word anymore to affirm its intention. It is aware that it is not attracted to the thoughts that continue to go by.

'Unfortunately, attachment is one of the hazards because when the prayer of quiet is flowing, you want to hang on to the experience for dear life as long as you can.

the prayer of quiet can expand. This stage is all laid out very beautifully and charmingly in St. Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*. She distinguishes a level of union in which the imagination is grasped so one is no longer persecuted by thoughts going by. Formerly, those faculties were free to wander. Now the divine action is so strong that it puts them to sleep, leaves them inactive. That's the prayer of union. In full union, then, the intellect and will are grasped and one loses consciousness of the self and is filled with joy.

But still this is only the beginning.

St John O the Cross observed that once our facility to rest in God in joy is well established, it seems then God has to teach us not to cling to those gifts, and that is when the dark night of spirit occurs.<sup>38</sup>

The divine therapist begins to work on the roots of our attachment to sources of happiness that are doomed to failure.. These are emotional programmes we receive from parents church and culture that actually turn us away from God.

Keating and Merton and others have observed that it's as though 'faith has to be purified; hope has to be in God alone and not in anything we have ever done. Love has to be pure so that we are seeking God not for our own satisfaction or reward but just because God is God.'

'One realizes that this is not punishment on God's part, nor is He playing hard to get. It is the nature of reality. You just can't enter into pure love without being completely detached from anything you want for yourself. So the journey takes awhile. It is an incredible project; only God could have thought it up: to bring something so wounded to that kind of freedom. To do God's will all the time and not even think of a reward or what happens to oneself is a marvelous project. I recommend it.' Keating says.

Keating, who has a Phd in Psychology 'saw psychotherapy right away as what God has been secretly doing for centuries by other names; that is, He searches through our personal history and heals what needs to be healed- the wounds of childhood or our own self-inflicted wounds. He preserves whatever was good in each stage of life and brings it to full flowering through the graces of spiritual progress and divine union.'

'If you want to call this higher states of consciousness or if you want to call it advanced stages of faith, hope, and charity, that is up to you.'

### **Guidelines for Centering Prayer – the prayer of consent<sup>39</sup>**

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within. This is done during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is right for us. Examples might be God, Jesus, Abba, Mother, Father, Amen, love, listen, peace, open or 'Shhh'. One can also employ what the ancients call the sacred glance toward the divine presence. Having chosen a word we don't change it during the prayer period because that would involve us in our thoughts again.
2. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed settle briefly. Then silently introduce the sacred word as your consent to God. A straight back helps us to stay awake. Closed eyes indicate letting go of what is going on around and within us. Keating says to introduce the sacred word as gently as laying a feather on a piece of cotton wool.
3. When you notice yourself engage with thoughts return gently to the sacred word to reorient yourself to God. This returning to the sacred word is the only activity we initiate in Centering Prayer and during the prayer the word may disappear as our prayer deepens. 'Thoughts are an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings images memories plans reflections commentaries and spiritual experiences.'<sup>40</sup> In Centering Prayer they are considered to be inevitable and normal, a minimum of effort is required to return to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer remain in silence with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer as the group listens.

The minimum time for this prayer is twenty minutes. With practice this extends in duration. Two periods are recommended each day.

Keating says: 'Centering prayer involves attention, but it's a general loving attention without particular content. The sacred word is not the object of the attention but rather the expression of the intention of the will. In centering prayer, we intend to consent *not* to do something. We develop a receptive attitude that doesn't require any effort. Instead of doing something constantly, you only keep saying the sacred word until you feel your intention is established in your will.'

It is my experience, that with practice over time you begin to sense when this is the case. You feel a sense of peace when you are not struggling with the temptation of distracting thoughts emotions or bodily discomfort.

Appendix II deals with this in sermon form.

## **The case for including the history and practice of contemplative prayer in the formation of ordained ministers**

The Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership forms ministers and leaders for service in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and partner churches. It is reasonable to suggest that a fully formed servant mission leader must first and foremost be able to connect with the living God at the deepest level of intimacy. It is the argument of this report, that the formation of ministers remains unfinished without an understanding of the history and practice of contemplative prayer.

When I began to build my case for the inclusion of contemplative prayer in ministry training, I was unaware that one of its leading contemporary exponents, Fr Thomas Keating, had made the same pitch to the Catholic Church twenty-five years ago. They did not listen then...but they are listening today.

In the intervening period, a global network of practitioners has developed along with an appreciation of the benefits of contemplative prayer for those in leadership – particularly as churches become increasingly risk averse.

My case is based on the following principles:

### **Ministry formation would be greatly enhanced by balancing theological and practical formation with intentional interior spiritual formation.**

In ministry and servant leadership we are entrusted with the spiritual care of others. Ministry training must therefore produce people who have themselves been spiritual formed in some systematic way. This formation cannot be assumed or left to chance. The practice of contemplative prayer would integrate a student's interiority with what they have mastered intellectually and in the field. Another exponent writes, 'because the Gospel invites everyone to communion with Christ, it is essential all spiritual leaders be mentored and taught ways to enter more deeply into intimacy with Christ.'<sup>41</sup>

### **Ministry formation should reflect the churches espousal of the transforming action of the Holy Spirit.**

However, it's my observation that while our ministers have a well integrated intellectual appreciation of the faith, they may lack the disciplines for developing an ever deeper intimacy with God that transforms the whole person. They have [little or] no familiarity with what the ancient church used to call 'the three Vias'. [*via purgativa, via illuminativa, and via unitiva.*]<sup>42</sup>

### **The wisdom of contemplative prayer encourages humility before God.**

Faith matures by progressive surrender. Learning about the history and practice of contemplative prayer would allow students to intentionally explore this process for themselves.

### **The practice of contemplative prayer allows God to reveal unconscious motivations and vestigial behaviours which frustrate spiritual maturity.**

When we are unaware of our programming it can greatly interfere with our ability to relate to God and to others. Appendix II argues this point in depth and in a theological context.

### **The practice of contemplative prayer can assist ministers to identify potential areas of weaknesses which could expose them and the church to risk.**

'Christ-centred kenosis' or 'holy silence' diminishes self-inflation and self-preoccupation and brings to light our ongoing need to repent and consent to God's transforming action in us. Bryan McLaren comments: 'You think of the ubiquitous clergy scandals of recent decades and you realize that whatever the strengths of the seminary, the *via purgativa* isn't a strong enough part of the curriculum.'<sup>43</sup> Such insight would enable ministers to engage more fruitfully in high quality clinical supervision.

### **Contemplative practice is a safe-guard against the cost of burnout to the individual and the Church.**

The bright evangelical mind—always so active and *in pursuit*—must leap great hurdles of spiritual and intellectual activity to shut itself down and be still.<sup>44</sup> Training in contemplative prayer offers a roadmap to the practice of silence before God. There are plenty of examples in the PCANZ where ministers have had to take a long period off work and on pay in order to recover from physical emotional and spiritual burnout.

The disciplined practice of contemplative prayer provides not only opportunity for increased intimacy with God, but daily time and space in an attitude of consent and surrender in which to rest, refocus and recharge batteries while God works on us. As part of its own risk management the PCANZ should be equipping its students with an actual method of stress management as well as an intellectual understanding.

**Contemporary approaches to centering prayer interweave Biblical insight into the human condition with contemporary understanding of the stages of human development, psychology and advances in neurophysiology.**

An understanding of the history and practice of contemplation would help ministers to articulate the process of spiritual formation to their congregations in contemporary language that is faithful to scripture.

**Contemplative practice allows ministers to model for their congregations the healthy balance required to sustain ongoing active service to God.**

The twenty first century is a time of extreme social anxiety. This pressure to perform can be transmitted through social groups and a congregation is no exception. High levels of anxious energy can interfere with a faith community's ability to function in a 'healthy' manner. In *Centering prayer and the work of the clergy*, David Lawson, maintains ministers can actually function as an 'immune system for their congregations, transforming the negative energy of anxiety into creative energy available to empower new ministry and growth.'<sup>45</sup>

Instead of a withdrawal from the world, contemplative prayer refreshes us for encounter with the world. Thomas Merton observed the ancients knew that 'there are times when activity must supplant contemplation. Both are in fact demanded by charity, since we are commended to love both God and our neighbour....the only solution to the conflict between those two claims on our hearts is to achieve the balance required by our own individual vocation with the church of God. The pastor of souls must not neglect the necessary element of prayer and meditation in his life.'<sup>46</sup>

It is the view of the Director of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Professor Kevin Clements, that without personal internal transformation efforts to transform the world are fruitless.<sup>47</sup> The role of contemplation in human transformation has 'three fundamental manifestations: listening to God, experiencing and being formed by God's presence, and manifesting the presence of God in us through our desires, words, and actions.'<sup>48</sup>

**Unless ministers in the PCANZ are equipped in contemplative prayer, people who are spiritually seeking will continue to look to other religious traditions for the spiritual experience they are not finding in their own churches.**

Without exposure to the church's contemplative history, ministers could serve a life time without understanding that what many people seek is a valuable part of the Christian tradition. While it's true that university courses in church history mention the desert mothers and fathers there is no attempt to outline at undergraduate level what these Amma and Abbas were actually doing to get closer to God.

**The practice of contemplative prayer is modelled in Jesus own ministry.**

A curriculum for ministry formation which includes the history and practice of contemplative prayer would be anchored firmly in Christ.

**The benefits of contemplative prayer are recognized across the theological spectrum**

In his book *Strengthen yourself in the Lord*, one of the most influential writers from the Pentecostal tradition encourages the practice of contemplative prayer, Calling it 'leaning into God', Bill Johnson describes a posture of listening by dialing down the voice of our own thoughts and waiting to hear Him'.<sup>49</sup>

At the other end of the Christian spectrum, is hermit priest, writer, and internationally known retreat leader, Cynthia Bourgeault. She has worked closely with Fr. Thomas Keating is an adjunct faculty member at the Vancouver School of Theology. Her book *Contemplative Prayer and Inner Awakening*<sup>50</sup> has attracted a lot of attention among contemplatives in New Zealand. In the past few years at the invitation of Christchurch based Adult Education Trust she has twice visited here to conduct workshops and seminars on Centering Prayer at St Andrew's on the Terrace in Wellington, and in Auckland, and Christchurch.

**The PCANZ is already grounded in the contemplative movement through Spiritual Growth Ministries**

For many years, Spiritual Growth Ministries has nurtured the Christian contemplative tradition in New Zealand by providing spiritual direction, formation of spiritual directors, retreats and other experiences of prayer.

Their Journal of Contemplative Spirituality, *Refresh*, has sought to stimulate thought, prayer and discipleship for over a decade.<sup>51</sup> While sprouting largely from Presbyterian soil, today SGM connects people from diverse Christian traditions and experience ‘who find depth and meaning through the whole Christian heritage of contemplative spirituality’.<sup>52</sup>

**As well as benefitting the individual, the fruits of contemplative prayer can be seen in the congregations and communities of those who practice its forms.**

Many practitioners of contemplative prayer, including myself, would be happy to offer training and retreats for ministry students and for those already in ministry when the need for further spiritual formation or refreshment is identified during the Ministry Development Review process.

There are excellent written and video resources for workshops and seminars which can be used to teach the history, practice and benefits of contemplative prayer in dialogue with contemporary science.

This study leave report invites the Principal and Staff of the Centre for Ministry and Leadership to seriously consider including a module on the history and practice of contemplative prayer in its curriculum.

I hope you will give positive consideration to my case.

**The Rev. Diane Gilliam-Weeks**  
**January 2010**

## **Appendix 1 Snowmass Intensive Retreat Schedule**

### OPENING EVENING

5:00 pm - Registration and final payments  
5:30 pm - Supper  
6:45 pm - Opening and Orientation

### WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE: FIRST DAY

5:30 am - Rise  
6:00 am - (1) 20 minute period of Centering Prayer  
6:30 am - Breakfast in silence  
7:30 am - Mass at the Monastery  
9:30 am - Conference: review method of CP – Beth Berkeley  
12:00 pm - Lunch in silence  
1:30 - 4:00 pm - Break / Walks & Talks with Staff  
4:00 pm - (2) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by a meditative walk  
5:00 pm - Q & A about method of CP – Beth Berkeley  
6:00 pm - Supper with talking  
7:00 pm - Vespers at the Monastery

### SCHEDULE FOR REMAINDER OF RETREAT (EXCEPT SUNDAY & MONDAY)

4:40 am - Rise  
5:00 am - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by a meditative walk  
6:30 am - Breakfast in silence  
7:30 am - Mass at the Monastery *[on Thursday it is just Lauds, with Mass in the evening]*  
9:15 am - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by meditative walk  
10:45 am - Conference (video)  
11:45 am - Small group discussion of tape if desired, no staff  
12:00 pm - Lunch in silence  
1:30 - 3:00 pm - Private interviews with retreat staff  
3:15 pm - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by a meditative walk  
4:45 m - Conference (video)  
5:45 pm - Small group discussion of tape if desired, no staff  
6:00 pm - Supper with talking  
7:00 pm - Vespers at the Monastery Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Monday. \*

\*Thursday: Sit-down Mass at Monastery.  
\*Sunday: Lectio Divina with Fr. Micah at the Retreat House

### SUNDAY SCHEDULE ONLY

5:25am - Rise  
5:45 am - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by meditative walk  
7:15 am - Breakfast in silence  
8:15 am - Mass at the Monastery  
10:15 am - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by meditative walk  
11:40 am - Conference (video)  
1:00 pm - Lunch in silence  
2:00 - 3:00 pm - Private interviews with retreat staff  
3:15 pm - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer, separated by meditative walk  
4:45 pm - Conference (video)  
6:00 pm - Supper with talking  
7:00 pm – Lectio with Fr. Micah (*Opportunity to take lectio passage into Retreat Day*)

### MONDAY SCHEDULE ONLY (SILENT RETREAT DAY)

On your retreat day, all three prayer periods will be two half-hour blocks of time with a walk in between rather than three 20 minute periods. There will be no readings at meals, no conferences and no talking at supper. This is your one day of the entire retreat for total silence. The silence has the potential to stretch from Sunday evening to Tuesday evening if you wish. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon prayer periods change in order to have a longer stretch of private time on this day.

5:00 am - (2) 30 minute periods with walk in between  
10:45 am - (2) 30 minute periods with walk in between.

4:45 pm - (2) 30 minute periods with walk in between.

TUESDAY MORNING

5:00 am – (2) 30 minute sits with walk in between

Rest of day same as normal schedule

WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE: LAST FULL DAY

4:40 am - Rise

5:00 am - (3) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer separated by a meditative walk

6:30 am - Breakfast in silence

7:30 am - Mass at the Monastery

9:15 am - (2) 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer

10:15 am - Conference: 1 hour 20 minutes with (2) 5 minute breaks

12:00 pm - Lunch with talking

1:30 – 3:00 pm - Private interviews with retreat staff

3:15 pm - (1) 30 minute period of Centering Prayer

4:15 pm - Conference (video)

5:15 pm - Small group discussion of tape if desired, no staff

5:30 pm - Supper with talking

6:30 pm – Closing

THURSDAY SCHEDULE: FINAL MORNING

5:30 am - Rise

6:00 am - (1) 30 minute period of Centering prayer

6:35 am - Breakfast

7:30 am - Lauds at Monastery (optional) >>>Shuttling for departures as scheduled by retreatants.



## Appendix II Repent: Contemplative Prayer and the stages of human development

Advent 3 year C Sermon 09 Repent Luke 3:7-18 Phil 4:4-7

What's with those readings set down for today? Paul's call to rejoice and be anxious for nothing...right after John the Baptist's dire warnings...to repent...

Well let's see how Paul's words might work for us this Christmas.

Next time your tummy's in a knot because you just don't have enough time to shop for Christmas presents...

Just remember to...Rejoice in the Lord always!

Or next time the one you love...gets grumpy and irritable and bites your head off...just try quoting Paul's words to them...Honey...‘Let your gentleness be known to everyone.’

And when you're standing in a long queue at New World on Christmas Eve... I mean one of those loooooong queues that goes right back to the milk and butter section... Just turn to the teenager behind you... who's trying buy grog underage

... and whisper in his ear...‘the Lord is near! Don't be anxious about anything.’

Words to live by... right? All we have to do is make our requests known to God... in prayer and thanksgiving...and a feeling of peace and joy will flood through us...Uh... yeah ok...maybe for a wee while...but... the very next time we're worried or frustrated...UP come those same old anxieties again. Something is wrong...

So what's at the root... of these continuing emotional difficulties...Why are they so hard to get rid of? Why do we get bogged down in the same old emotional patterns...why can't we just be happy...

Jesus was clear about why. Didn't he tell us these emotions of ours...are actually pretty good indicators...of where we're really looking for happiness? Didn't Jesus say, ‘For where your treasure is... there your heart will be also.’

Ding dong...Now right there is exactly where the call to repent comes in. The one we heard in the other reading, John the Baptist...and later Jesus...are essentially saying... You're looking for happiness in all the wrong places...they're talking about surface happiness... haa hee happiness... but the kind of happiness that brings lasting fulfilment and contentment.

They're saying Turn away from those things that are never going to make you happy...and turn back to God and God's prescription for happiness. That's what repentance really means.

But the problem is... some of our programmes for happiness have been wired in so early in life we can't even remember. And before we can rejoice and receive God's peace...they need to be rooted out.

Paul was as confused about this we are... wasn't he when he said in Roman's 15... I don't understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

That's why even for a great apostle like Paul ...spiritual formation a process...and not the instant wiping out of our entire emotional history.

And in the call to repent...what John and Jesus knew in the first century...took modern psychology 2000 years to figure that out. Sometimes the sins we need to turn away from aren't even ours...they're the sins of our fathers or mothers...or teachers or peers. And sometimes they didn't even know they were sinning against us.

One of my study leave mentors a priest with a Phd in psychology[i] explains this is easier to understand when we remember... that of all newborn mammals...none is more helpless than a human baby...who is completely dependent on the welcome they get...when they arrive in the world...

Thomas Keating says...The best a human baby can do to make its basic needs known for food and affection...is cry...loudly...But suppose a baby's born into a world that's not welcoming at all...where mum or dad wish they hadn't been born. Now that baby's likely to have emotional difficulty accepting life at all...

But in the next stage of our development...by time we're two...we can do a lot more than cry to make people aware of our needs for pleasure and affection and appreciation. We have an understanding of our own separate existence. We begin to want our own way...and so at this stage our desire for control develops.

But suppose a child lives where there can be no control...where their survival is in question...where violence is the order of the day...or where sickness or starvation or the danger of losing a parent...are ever-present?

Such a child will find it harder and harder...  
to give emotional consent to any goodness and beauty in life or in the world. Because they have not known it.

Or maybe a child is born with some disability, or finds themselves in competition with big brothers and sisters for food or attention...in these circumstances they could develop lifelong feelings of inferiority.

When the needs of a child under two are frustrated they have no way to discern why it's happening. They only have their feelings to go by...so if their mother is sick and can't give them any affection...they have no way to explain it. All they feel is that their need for love is being frustrated. And this could lead to recurring feelings of fear or hostility... later in life

And even if we never experienced serious emotional trauma in childhood...we've all been through this time of vulnerability... and we all carry with us...wounds that can get in the way of receiving the peace of God...

Sometimes if we've been deprived of security at a early age...then the things... that symbolise security in our culture...can exercise enormous control over us.

And if this is true...when we can't obtain the symbol of security we desire...the car...the house...the money...the partner...the image...or the prestige we want...  
then we can experience very strong emotions...of grief or anger or jealousy...  
if we feel insecure enough...our needs grow into demands...that finally ingrained as 'shoulds'...bearing no resemblance to the virtues of the Gospel.

And in the pursuit of absolute security we come to expect ourselves and others... to conform to our demands whether they're realistic or not. Unconsciously we need to control everything and everyone. And instead of a programme for happiness we're pursuing a prescription for misery...because it can't possible work.

And all this happens when our emotional lives are stuck...at the level of a two year old and we don't even know it.

But wait there's more...if we make it through toddlerhood unscathed...in the years between four and eight...other programmes for happiness begin to develop...and this is a time when children take on without question...the values of their parents...their teachers... and their peers.

The years between four and eight are when... our sense of who we are and what we're worth...develops according to the approval or disapproval of those around us. When we live up to their expectations...we feel happy...if we don't... then we sense their disappointment... and we feel bad.

And if we're not aware of it these feelings can come right back in adulthood when we're faced with disapproval.

But the good news is a few years later... at eleven or twelve... we finally arrive at the stage of development when we can think and reason for ourselves...what a relief...and this stage lasts for most of our lives...and if this were the end it we'd only seek happiness in rewarding places from then on.

But the bad news is...instead of using our rational intelligence to grow...we tend to harness our reason to the old programmes for happiness we bring with us from childhood...and we commit our intelligence to pursuing pleasure or absolute security or control and power...

And we rationally believe if we can only get enough of what we desire...finally we'll be happy. I'll give you an example ... of the successful business magnate... who has a hundred million dollars in assets...and is still not satisfied. They make a million dollars a day... but their craving for more is insatiable. The nature of their emotional programming is this...when I have enough financial security...then I'll be happy

Or for others if I can just get enough pleasure I'll be happy...if I can just get enough control...over people...maybe even God...then I'll be truly happy...[pause]...but they can never get enough because it doesn't work.

Didn't Jesus teach us riches and security and pleasure can't actually deliver the goods...and if we think they can then we'll always have a gnawing unfulfilled hunger...for happiness.

And most of us are unaware these programmes for happiness...are running inside us...influencing our decisions...our relationships...even our spiritual life. And meanwhile powers and principalities of greed and lust in the world can take full advantage of our insecurities...because we're unaware of them.

And this brings us right into the heart...of the problem of the human condition. The problem addressed head-on in the Gospel... by John the Baptist and by Jesus. With the call to...repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.'

Jesus and John are not talking about the need to perform harsh religious rituals of self-punishment. They're talking about... changing the direction in which... you're looking for happiness. Remember Jesus said...happy are those who...are poor in spirit. Happy are the merciful...the peacemakers...

And this explains why we can bring everything to God in prayer and still feel frustrated...anxious and fearful...because we're still aiming our efforts in the wrong direction.

You see in spiritual terms...it's not enough simply to experience conversion...and intellectually choose the values of the Gospel. Conversion is only the starting point... the real work of our salvation... is to name and dismantle these futile programmes for happiness...and replace them with the virtues revealed to us by Jesus.

But we can't do it on our own we need God's help for the process of change to occur. And if we won't consent to God's help...well... our misery making programmes will just keep running beneath the surface...till they're activated all over again by frustration... fear... or failure.

You know when you and I come to church... we don't pretend these futile old programmes aren't there.

We accept that one way or another... whether it's our fault or not... we've all fallen short ...and we all have wounds that need to be healed...we're all in need of the great physician.

The work of repentance is to allow God to bring these things to the surface so we can name them and let them go. What follows from the call to repent...is the call to consent. To consent to God's transforming action in us...And learning to consent to Gods work in us... is my theme for next week.

And if the Body of Christ...if the Church... is really going to have a show of helping to change the world... the process of change has to first happen...in the hearts of each one of us...through the divine therapy of the Holy Spirit... only then as a community of faith can we can effectively play our part in God's transforming work in the world.

### Appendix III Consent: Contemplative Prayer and surrender to God's transforming action in us

Advent 4 year C Sermon 09 Mary's consent

Mary's consent to God's action in her life...

runs contrary to all the things that promise us... fulfilment in this world.

Worldly wisdom...material abundance...the perfect image for ourselves and our families...absolute security...are just some of the things the world wants us to crave.

Yet Mary surrenders her will and her life...  
her future fulfilment and happiness... to the will of God.  
When she's invited to give up her dreams and plans...  
to the future God will reveal...Mary consents

'May it be to me as you have said.'

The lead up to Christmas is a time when the world intensifies its promises to deliver happiness. Toys aren't just toys...their marketing promises to bring us together  
...as happy families...sharing golden moments of joy.

Products...promise to make us secure and safe and beautiful. Underarm deodorants promise to make us confident. Toothpaste promises to make us sexy.

'Tis the season to buy fulfilment.'

The world keeps promising and we keep consuming.  
The serpent in the garden promises wisdom...  
and Adam and Eve turn toward its voice...  
leaving their trusting relationship with God behind.

But the message of the Gospel... is clear isn't it  
fulfilment will never come...from what we think we desire in the world. And if we're unaware of this...  
the world of marketing and image management ...  
will keep us too busy to even look for deeper satisfaction.

We discovered last week... just how much emotional investment we make in these cultural and market driven programmes for happiness. It's just as Jesus said, 'where our treasure is... our hearts will be also...

and we can see the evidence of this...  
in our emotional reactions to not getting what we want...  
and we feel anxious or angry when our desires are frustrated

And we heard how Jesus calls us... to turn away from futilely seeking happiness in all the wrong places...  
how he calls us to repent...and turn our attention in God's direction... toward God's way of mercy  
compassion and peace with justice.

And we discovered...that deciding to turn our lives around this way... is only the beginning...because  
even our best efforts to do the will of God...can be undermined by emotional programming that we're  
simply unaware of.

So the real work of repentance...is letting God renew our hearts and minds... by bringing all that is  
hidden into the light... so it can be named and let go. Allowing God to transform us from the inside out.  
In other words...  
what follows logically from Jesus' call to repent...  
is the call to consent...to God's action in us.

But how?

Well, Mary giving permission to God is our clue.  
'Let it be to me as you have said.'

Mary's consent to God's action in her life... is unconditional.

She doesn't say... well OK... I'll have this baby...but only if there's no social fall out... only with a guarantee I'll never suffer. No, Mary's consent is one hundred percent...not ninety eight point nine percent.

So you might say that in giving her consent...Mary embodies the great commandment...to love God... with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength.

If you can't see yourself doing this...then think of our spiritual life as a dance with God. Because in a sense Mary has accepted God's invitation to dance... and she's decided to let God lead.

Just for fun let's do an experiment which demonstrates what I'm talking about. I've asked Janice and Carrick to come up for a little dance demonstration.

Both try to lead then

Janice lets Carrick lead

Now it's easy to see how awkward and graceless it is when both partners try to lead. But when the one who's following can relax... and let the other do the steering ... then the dance flows easily across the floor.

On the dance floor of life...most of us have difficulty letting go control... and allowing God to take the lead. We do try to turn our will and our lives over to God... but it's scary not being in control. So time and time again... we take the lead back.

And at the root of this difficulty are questions of faith...

Just how much do we trust God?

Do we really believe God can and will change us from the inside out if we allow it...and do we really believe God's way...offers us the deepest fulfilment.

And if our faith is weak... is there any way we can become like Mary and let God lead? Is there some method we can learn...to make surrender possible...when we live in a world that's competing day and night for our hearts and minds.

Well just like dancing cheek to cheek...learning to surrender our will and our lives to the care of God... takes time and discipline and practice... just as on Dancing with the Stars.

For the past two thousand years... Christians have been letting go and letting God...in a form of prayer...

It's an ancient Christian spiritual discipline... called the prayer of consent...or the prayer of quiet...today it's sometimes called Centering Prayer. It's a discipline I've had for years... and the subject of my recent study leave.

We call the prayer of consent a spiritual discipline... because we're disciplined about doing it. Here are Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6 in *The Message* translation:

*"Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."*

So in obedience to Jesus the first thing we do is make time. Time to open ourselves to God's transforming action in us. In our busy lives it helps to have a set time every day...maybe just five minutes to start with... but twenty is ideal.

But the hardest thing about of the prayer of consent...  
is just learning to be still... the most difficult part for us to grasp...is that God does all the work...we don't have to do anything...and we're not very good at that...so we have to practice doing nothing...in the presence of God.

It's hard to let go and let God...because our hearts and our minds...are on other things...even in prayer... thoughts and images are constantly swirling around in our heads...distracting us and taking our attention away from God...yet this is a time when God must increase...and we must decrease.

And in the prayer of consent...we don't get up-tight about distracting thoughts... we just practice gently letting them go... and turning our attention back to God... in an attitude of openness and surrender.

Some people find it helpful to have a sacred word...  
like the name of Jesus, or Abba...or Father...a word that symbolises their willingness to consent. And when they notice they're caught up in their thoughts again...  
they just gently bring to mind the sacred word...  
to turn their attention back to God.

Now if you're tempted to sigh and say 'look...Diane...  
its alright for you...but where on earth am I going to find time... just to sit in silence with God...I've got so many demands on my time already...people expect things of me...I'm so busy pursuing my other programmes for happiness ...

Well... if you're resistant to the idea of making time... to practice the prayer of consent... then the next time your tummy's in a knot or you're your let down by a friend or frustration gets the best of you...I invite you to ask yourself... if a little resting in silence with God...  
could be just what the divine doctor ordered.

When you lose your cool next time...  
why not consider the possibility that God could and would transform your life... with your consent...  
why not give God time... to conform you more and more into the image of the Christ...

Perhaps that's what it means... to love God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength...  
so you can gain the inner peace necessary to love your neighbour as yourself.

Far from withdrawing from the world...the spiritual discipline of the prayer of consent... can help us live in the world the Jesus way.... And with time and practice we will find it easier to consent as Mary did...  
to the coming of the Christ into her life.

May our Lord Jesus now enter our Christmas...  
in this sacred meal.

#### Appendix IV A small sample of projects and courses offered at other seminaries and universities

A letter from a distinguished educator

Dear Diane,

Many thanks for your email. Unfortunately I am not aware of ANY ministry formation programme that includes what you describe. That's a big problem in my view. I know many in ministry (or in formation for ministry) who are drawn to contemplative prayer, but they seek this out on their own (as I did).

Whatever you do would be of immense value. There is an interesting quotation from Richard Harries's *GOD OUTSIDE THE BOX: WHY SPIRITUAL PEOPLE OBJECT TO CHRISTIANITY*. On p. 150 he quotes Canon John Fenton's (from Christ Church, Oxford) address to ordinands:

"What the Church will need as its priests is men and women who know that the important and obvious thing about God is that he is silent. He does not speak...or do anything to assure us that he is there. He meets us in his silence.... What the Church needs is people who believe in shutting up; that God is not a talking God; that we do not have the word of God, we have the silence of God. That's all there is, and that's what makes us tick; that's what we want to bring others into. The purpose of Christian talk is to get us to stop talking."

I realize you weren't asking for a quotation, but this is just by way of saying that this well known scripture scholar and Oxford don, would applaud your efforts.

Blessing to you and your ministry,

Martin [S. Laird]

Author of The "Open Country Whose Name is Prayer": *Modern Theology* : 2005:21:1 :141 -155

*Into the silent land: a guide to the Christian practice of contemplation.*  
Oxford, Oxford University Press (2006).

*Trinity Theological Seminary*

*Contemplative Prayer Practicum (AT322/522)*

In response to Jesus' call for personal transformation, contemplative prayer is a grace-filled attentiveness to God that initiates and sustains a change of consciousness, leading to deepening love of God and neighbor. This course sets contemplative prayer in the context of the Bible and the experience of the Christian community. It explores the necessity of intentional daily experience of God as a fundamental source of spiritual discernment, vision and energy for our lives. Emphasis is given to personal experience of a variety of forms of contemplative prayer in class, at home, and in parish settings. Participants develop a design for sharing contemplative prayer in a parish or other institutional setting. This class is co-sponsored by the Contemplative Ministry Project. Adj. Prof. David Keller, 3 Credits. (Practicum courses are not available for audit). (June 14-18, 2010 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sherred 1B.) For further information, contact [registrar@gts.edu](mailto:registrar@gts.edu)

Keller together with Fr. Thomas Keating began the The Contemplative Ministry Project is an effort to summarize the contemplative dimension of the Christian gospel and suggest ways that contemplative prayer and spiritual formation may become more intentional parts of the curriculum in today's schools of theology and seminaries. Seminary deans, faculty and students endorse this goal, in the belief that patterns of meditation and inner spiritual growth formed during theological education will build a more spiritually grounded and wiser clergy and lay leadership for the Church. Spiritual formation that takes place in a theology school will become a life-long resource for clergy and their congregations. At the same time, church leaders who are deeply grounded in a life of prayer will be able to provide spiritual direction to parish life and mentor parishioners as they try to integrate personal prayer and spiritual wisdom into their busy and responsible lives. Led by the Rev. David Keller, CMP's Advisory Board includes Thomas Keating, OSCO, founder of Contemplative Outreach, The Rev. Tilden Edwards, Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Dr Jonathan Linman, Director of General Theological Seminary's Center of Christian Spirituality, Dr. Patrick Mitchell of St John's Seminary, Camarillo, CA, Dr Glen Hinson, Baptist Seminary of Louisville, KY and Nancy Roth, staff of the CREDO project, a clergy wellness program.

In partnership with selected seminaries and theological schools, Trust funds will help support pilot projects which develop and evaluate courses in Christian contemplation.

Emory University is now offering a graduate level programme Initiatives in Religious Practice and Practical Theology. Grounding the Vision in Perpetual Light: Historical Christian Contemplative Practices and the Care of Souls in the Modern Parish: Feminist Considerations

*Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest Austin Texas.*

### **DLF6008 When God Walks Away: Exploring and Enduring the Dark Night of the Soul**

John of the Cross coined the poetic term "dark night" for a painful, perturbing, and ultimately blessed stretch on the spiritual journey. In this experiential course, we will explore metaphors for aspects of the dark night as depicted in film, music, visual art pieces, and literature. We will differentiate the Night of the Senses from the Night of the Spirit; we will also differentiate the dark night from depression. Course participants will engage in spiritual practices designed for dark night endurance.

### **DLF6004 We are One with You: Spiritual Insights from Thomas Merton**

A Roman Catholic Trappist monk, Thomas Merton was a prolific writer whose work continues to invite millions of readers the world over into contemplative living. In this course, we will learn about Merton's life, and read some of his writings on the contemplative life, on compassion, and on social justice. We will reflect on the ways in which contemplative living leads to practicing non-violence and working for peace. And we will attempt to incorporate Merton's lessons with regard to silence, awareness, and attention into our daily lives.

### **DLF6002 The Desert Mothers: Spiritual Practices from Women of the Wilderness**

Who were the desert mothers? What do their lives, their sayings, and their practices of prayer have to teach us in our modern day? How might we learn from their steadfast attention to the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbors as our selves? Using material from her text of the same title, Mary C. Earle will introduce students to the desert mothers. We will learn about our foremothers in the Christian faith and discover some practical ways of living out that Great Commandment in the modern world.

Fr Thomas Keating is frequently a Visiting Distinguished Scholar at Vancouver School of Theology and other seminaries teaching on *The Contemplative Dimension of Life*.

The Rev Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault has twice toured New Zealand in 2009 bringing this dimension of prayer into Presbyterian Churches.



## **Appendix V A few online resources and expressions of contemplative life**

Spiritual Growth Ministries - <http://www.sgm.org.nz>

Contemplative Outreach - <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org>

The Shalem Institute - <http://www.shalem.org>

Renovare - <http://www.renovare.us/>

The World Community for Christian Meditation - <http://www.wccm.org>

The Empty Bell - <http://www.emptybell.org>

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> MERTON, T. & DEIGNAN, K. (2007). *A book of hours*. Notre Dame, Ind, Sorin Books, 151.
- <sup>2</sup> Difference from Zen and other eastern forms of meditation: Christian contemplatives assert that God is infinitely transcendent and infinitely immanent. That is the extraordinary part: God couldn't be closer, closer even than consciousness. But the Christian articulation of that mystery is a little different from [that of] the East. The Christian would say we are not God, whereas the Vedic tradition says that you become God. Keating muses, 'I think we may be talking about the same experience of divine union, but our Christian belief system requires us to say that you may be so united to God that you can't distinguish yourself from Him but that He nevertheless remains ontologically distinct.' In KEATING, T. (2008). *Spirituality, contemplation, & transformation: writings on centering prayer*. New York, Lantern Books, x.
- <sup>3</sup> Christian Meditation, designed by John Main is now spreading rapidly throughout the world under the charismatic leadership of Father Lawrence Freeman. This approach goes in the same direction as centering prayer with its emphasis on moving beyond dependence on concepts and words to a direct encounter with God on the level of faith and interior silence. He offered his practitioners the discipline of saying the mantra "maranatha" nonstop for 20 minutes or half an hour. This contemplative method resembles the Jesus Prayer of Eastern Orthodox tradition, in which "Lord Jesus God have mercy on me" is said over and over again both during and outside of prayer periods until it says itself almost independently or arises spontaneously.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.livingrosaries.org/interview.htm>
- <sup>5</sup> MCLAREN, B. D. (2008). *Finding our way again: the return of the ancient practices*. Nashville, Tenn, Thomas Nelson.
- <sup>6</sup> KELLER, David, *Reading Living Water* In KEATING, T. (2008). *Spirituality, contemplation, & transformation: writings on centering prayer*. New York, Lantern Books, 134.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas Keating, *The Spiritual Journey: a guidebook*. 23. Unpublished.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. 28. Spiritual means here subtle ways of trying to manipulate God.
- <sup>9</sup> KEATING, T. (2006). *Open mind, open heart: the contemplative dimension of the Gospel*. New York, Continuum, 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. 20.
- <sup>11</sup> KELLAR ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* is an anonymous work of Christian mysticism written in Middle English in the latter half of the 14th century. The text is a spiritual guide on contemplative prayer. CLOUD. (1961). *The cloud of unknowing*. Penguin classics, L108
- <sup>13</sup> MERTON, T. (1989). *Contemplative Prayer*. New York, Doubleday, 20
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. 21.
- <sup>15</sup> Cloud, ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. 23.
- <sup>17</sup> Merton, CP, Ibid. 24.
- <sup>18</sup> JOHN OF THE CROSS, & PEERS, E. A. (1959). *Dark night of the soul*. Garden City, N.Y., Image Books
- <sup>19</sup> Merton, CP, ibid. 44.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid. 76.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. 87.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. 83.
- <sup>23</sup> Frennet in Keating SCT Ibid, 14
- <sup>24</sup> Merton CP, Ibid, 90
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Frennet in Keating, SCT, Ibid 21.
- <sup>27</sup> Ward, in Keating SCT, x.
- <sup>28</sup> Keating, OMOH, ibid. 175.
- <sup>29</sup> *Cloud, ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Merton says, "We rarely pray with the 'mind' alone. Monastic meditation . . . involve[s] the whole man, and proceed[s] from the centre of man's being." Merton CP ref?
- <sup>31</sup> Keating, SCT, ibid. 2.
- <sup>32</sup> At one 1997 workshop alone, led by Keating and Gustave Reininger, 550 people squeezed into a San Francisco Episcopal church. The New York Open Center offered a four-month and the Boulder-based audio-cassette company Sounds True recently released a 24-cassette series of lectures by Keating on "The Contemplative Journey." <http://www.livingrosaries.org/interview.htm>
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. <http://newphysicstheory.com/>
- <sup>34</sup> Keating, SCT, ibid 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. 4
- <sup>36</sup> <http://www.livingrosaries.org/interview.htm>
- <sup>37</sup> The Welcoming Prayer is a method of actively letting go of thoughts and feelings that support the false-self system. It helps to dismantle the emotional programs of the false-self system and to heal the wounds of a lifetime by addressing them where they are stored - in the body. The method of the Welcoming Prayer includes noticing the feelings, emotions, thoughts and sensations in your body, welcoming them, and then letting them go. Practicing the Welcoming Prayer offers one the opportunity to make choices responding instead of reacting to the present moment.
- <sup>38</sup> [http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_practices\\_welcoming](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_practices_welcoming)
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> John of the Cross, ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Keating, OHOM, ibid. 177. See also Appendix III of this report.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. 178.
- <sup>43</sup> Keller in SCT ibid. 184.
- <sup>44</sup> MCLAREN, B. D. (2008). *Finding our way again: the return of the ancient practices*. Nashville, Tenn, Thomas Nelson.
- <sup>45</sup> MCLAREN, B. D. (2008). *Finding our way again: the return of the ancient practices*. Nashville, Tenn, Thomas Nelson. 153.
- <sup>46</sup> Patrick Raybon in an online review of Lairds book *Into the silent land* in Christianity Today Dec 16, 2009
- <sup>47</sup> Lawson in SCT. Ibid 187.
- <sup>48</sup> Merton, CP, ibid. 52ff.
- <sup>49</sup> Personal conversation at the Aspiring Faith Community Summer School 2010.
- <sup>50</sup> KELLER, ibid. 133.

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<sup>49</sup> JOHNSON, B. (2007). *Strengthen yourself in the Lord: how to release the hidden power of God in your life*. Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image Publishers, 85.

<sup>50</sup> BOURGEAULT, C. (2004). *Centering prayer and inner awakening*. Cambridge, Mass, Cowley Publications

<sup>51</sup> [http://www.sgm.org.nz/Refresh%20Archive/refresh\\_1\\_1.htm](http://www.sgm.org.nz/Refresh%20Archive/refresh_1_1.htm) This edition completely devoted to Contemplative Prayer in today's church.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.sgm.org.nz>