

OUR FINAL ISSUE!

UNION LIFE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1998

*Dedicated to an expanding
awareness of God's mystery,
which is Christ in you.*



The Call to Prayer

UNION LIFE

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Mailing Addresses:

Home Office
P.O. Box 2877
Glen Ellyn, IL 60138

Internet Address:

<http://www.unionlife.com>

If you wish to talk to anyone about *Union Life*, call the Home Office (630) 871-7734; if there is no one there, please leave a message; or FAX us at (630) 871-7734; or you may call Bill Volkman at (630) 469-1830.

Great Britain and Canada

Write to Home Office.

Australian Readers

Mar—Nov:

Write to Home Office.

Dec—Feb:

Write to Jan Ord

P.O. Box 901

Melton VIC 3337

(Phone (03) 9746-1533, Dec-Feb)

or Phyllis Corben

14 Jeffrey Street

Blackburn VIC 3130

(03) 9878-0351 (Mar-Nov)

Editor

Bill Volkman

Executive Editor

Jan Ord

Production

Claudia Volkman

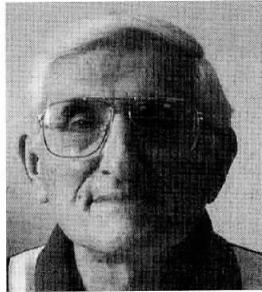
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Transcendent Living

by Bill Volkman

An important beginning point for transcendent living is found in an understanding of the well-known—but little experienced—Scriptural phrase: “This mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The surrounding verses emphasize that our only hope of experiencing glory (heavenly bliss and splendor) in this temporal world is in *experiencing* the reality of the indwelling Spirit of Love.

There is no greater mystery than the truth that Deity has chosen to take up residence in the hearts of all faith persons. Imagine: Christ living in you and in me! We gulp at the thought. But we must not allow our feelings of human weakness and unworthiness to cause us to deny the reality of our spiritual oneness with the Trinity. Our continuing awareness of this oneness will ultimately convince us that, not only are we unconditionally loved by the Father, but that His unconditional love is for all humanity.

Our destiny is to be conformed to the image of Christ—that is, to be a lover of all people, just as Christ is a lover of all people. As we experience His unconditional love for us, it becomes clear that our love for ourselves, for God and for others is not an option, but an imperative. We must love, and will love, because He first loved us.

As God enlightens us and gifts us with a greater measure of awareness of His unconditional love, we will be transformed in our souls, and we will see others with the single eye of love. And how does this awakening come about? II Corinthians 3:18 makes it crystal clear: “And we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory.”

As we come in humility (with unveiled faces—dropping our masks), turning our eyes on Jesus (beholding the Lord), we are being transformed into the image of Christ. In other words, as we rest in silence in His presence, we are changed.

“Come to Me,” Jesus said, “and you will find rest for your soul.” And where is He? He is both transcendent *and* immanent. But, most importantly for everyday living, He’s within, at the core of our being, where our human spirit and His indwelling

(cont. on p. 32)

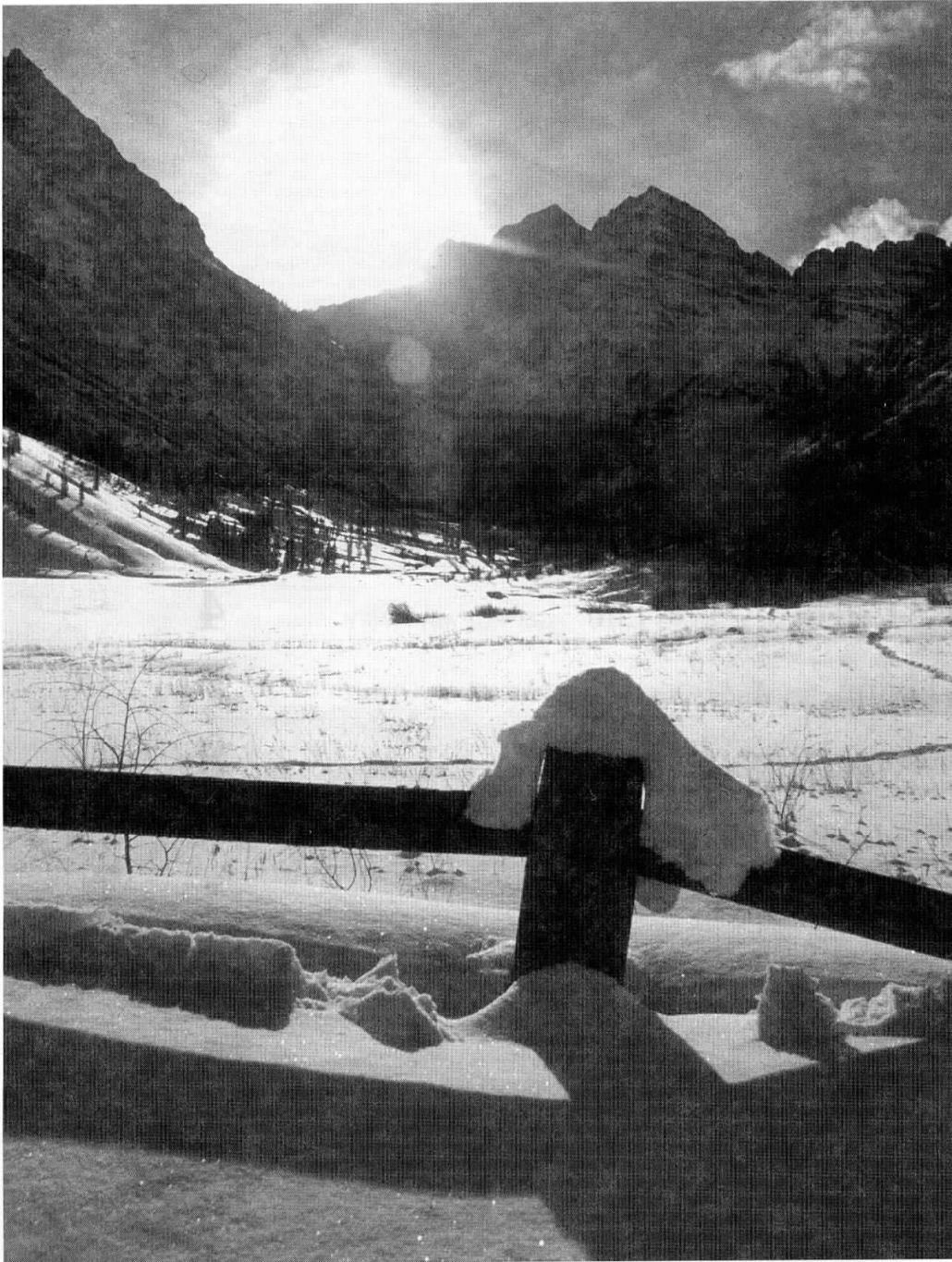


THE CALL TO PRAYER

The simple beauty of the cover painting — depicting people responding to the midday bells calling them to prayer — reminds us to be aware that we are always being called to respond to God.

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Cover photo: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, New York, New York. THE ANGELUS by Jean François Millet (1857), Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France.



JIM WHITMER

The Awakening

by William Shannon

The understanding of God as the Ground of all that is, and of contemplative prayer as becoming conscious of what is already there, are the two pillars on which we build our understanding of what is meant by "contemplative spirituality." Prayer, silence, and solitude are moments of grace that can awaken us to the contemplative side of our being. And we need to be awakened to it. But let's realize that the contemplative side is there for the awakening.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE mode of spirituality accepts the importance of devotions and the sacraments in the life of the Christian. Obviously it also accepts the truth of the transcendence of God. Yet it refuses to identify that transcendence with the vision of a God who sustains and guides the universe *from afar*.

It would maintain that it is simply a misunderstanding of the transcendence of God to conceive of God as "there" and creatures as "here." On the contrary, once God chose to create, God's transcendence necessarily flowed into God's immanence.

The transcendence of God must not be conceived of in the following terms: there exists a whole series of beings or objects in the world; all of these objects are created, except One; and that One is God. Of course, as the uncreated One, God is the most important Object of all, but still an object whose existence we can prove and whose attributes we can describe. No! Such a view is simply false to reality.

It is important that we realize that the transcendence of God excludes any notion that God is one

I can find myself and my interrelations with other people in God, only if I am aware that I am in God's Presence.

existent among other existents. Rather, God is the *Ground* of all that exists. God is the immanent One, that is to say, the One who is present in all things as the Source whence they come and as the

Ground in which they continue to be. God is in all and all exist because of God and in God.

Contemplative prayer is nothing other than "the coming into consciousness" of what is already there. We must, Merton says, "love God as our other self, that is, our truer and deeper self."

This understanding of God *as the Ground of all that is*, and of contemplative prayer *as becoming conscious of what is already there*, are the two pillars on which we can build our understanding of what is meant by "contemplative spirituality."

In writing to the students at Smith College in 1967 and commenting on their reading and sharing of his writings, Merton speaks of his oneness with them and says there is no greater happiness than "the happiness of being at one with everything in that *hidden ground of love* for which there can be no explanations."

It is this "Ground of Love," in which I am at all times, that I find my identity, my uniqueness, and my interrelatedness. Yet I can find myself and my interrelations with other people in God *only if I am aware that I am in God's Presence*. The task of prayer, then, is to help me to achieve this conscious awareness that I am indeed in God.

That is why I suggest that if the truth of God as the Ground of Love of all things is one pillar of contemplative spirituality, the other pillar is the understanding of contemplative prayer as the way of arriving at the awareness of what already is. I am in God. But I must realize it. What this means, in very practical terms, is that I don't have to worry about "getting anywhere" in prayer, because I am already there. I simply have to become *aware* of this.

That is why I describe the wordless prayer that disposes us for contemplative prayer as *the prayer of awareness*.

It needs to be said, therefore, that we do not really become contemplatives. For we are—all of us—contemplatives in the root and ground of our being. For at the root of our being we are one with God, one with one another, one with the world in which we live.

Spending time in prayer, therefore, must not be looked upon as a means of *achieving* this oneness, but

We are, all of us, contemplatives in the root and ground of our being.

of *recognizing* that it is there. Prayer does not *make* us contemplatives; rather it can make us *aware* that we truly are contemplatives, but at a level of perception we do not often achieve. Prayer, silence, and solitude are moments of grace that can awaken us to the contemplative side of our being. And we need to be awakened to it. But it is there for the awakening. □

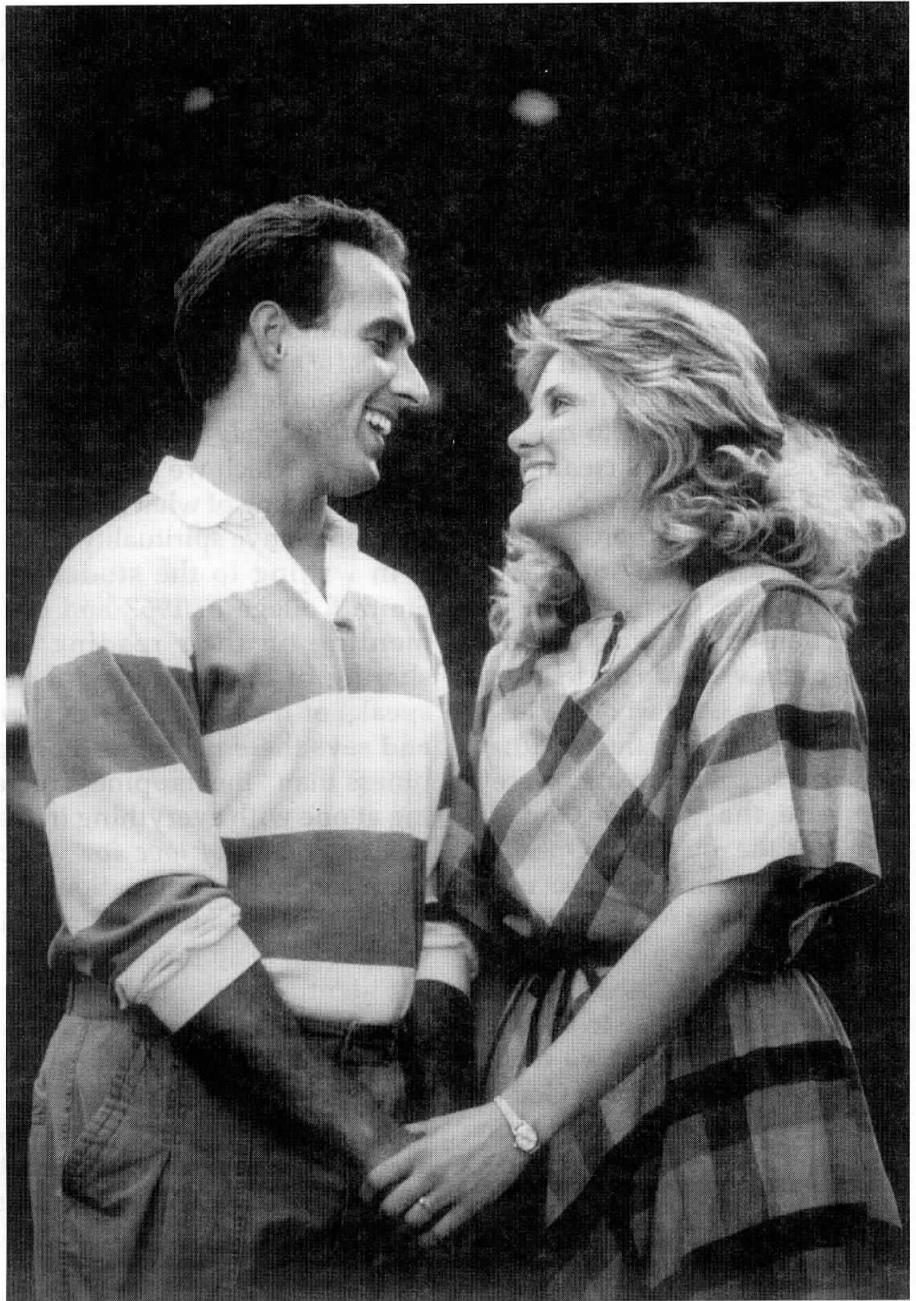
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William Shannon is a Roman Catholic priest and Professor Emeritus at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York. He is the founding president of the International Thomas Merton Society, as well as the author of many books and articles.

Marriage: A Call to the Mystical Life

by George Maloney



JIM WHITMER

God communicates His loving presence to us through all of creation. Yet He shares Himself with us more perfectly through the gifts of human beings who love us and whom we are privileged to love. When two people marry, they submit themselves to live in a world of mystery. Marriage is a call to contemplation, a call to enter the mystical life.

WOMAN AND MAN stalk this earth in a feverish hunt for happiness. We seek it in money, pleasure, travel, food, and sex; yet all these things fail to satisfy the pain in our hearts. For our hearts yearn for a happiness that never brings boredom, that is imperishable, and that lasts forever.

After some limited experiences in life we soon learn that there can be no real happiness without love. Without love there is bitterness, emptiness, and meaninglessness in life. Love for another brings purpose to our wanderings and identity to our true selves. God made us to love: to give and accept unselfish love. He

who is Love has created us, not to be alone, but to receive a share in His being by loving one another.

God communicates His loving presence to us through all of creation. Yet He shares Himself with us more perfectly through the gifts of human beings who love

God needs human beings so that He can be "love present and experienced."

us and whom we are privileged to love. God's uncreated energies of love are experienced most when we, in unselfish giving and receiving of love, meet His loving presence in others. God *needs* human beings so that He can be "love present and experienced." In His eternal plan He willingly made us as creatures to be fulfilled and happy with His life in and through our human loves.

Let us look at the mystery of Christian marriage and how the contemplative life for married persons intensifies both their total love for God/Trinity and their love for their neighbor as they love each other in God's perfect love. When two people marry, they submit themselves to live in a world of mystery. There is awe and wonderment. There is also, if one will permit it, an opening to one's own areas of darkness, which are hidden deeply within the various levels of the conscious and the unconscious. As well as becoming painfully aware of our own failings, we see the brokenness and imperfections in our partner.

There is also a call to integration as a whole person, through the unselfish love given at each moment of

Christian marriage is a sacrament, built upon contemplation of the indwelling Trinity by the two married persons.

married life. Above all, for Christians, marriage is a sacramental encounter in which husbands and wives are prayerfully, in deep faith, hope, and love, to meet Jesus Christ, the Savior. Jesus transforms the couple's sincere, loving desires into one body—just as Christ is one with His Church.

A logical analysis of marriage will never succeed in presenting its true essence. Because marriage brings

together the uncreated energies of God, loving and giving Himself to the married couple, it remains always a mystery that must be approached in a prayerful reverence. Because God centers His transforming power in the material world through the risen Jesus Christ, marriage is a mysterious, sacramental encounter when we surrender to His lordship.

Marriage is a call to contemplation, a call to enter the *mystical* life. In using the term *mystical*, we are not referring to the *extraordinary* prayer-life of the great *mystics*, which generally remain closed to ordinary people. Rather, we refer to the Christian tradition in which the life of God and His loving action in their lives is accessible to all people. We are called to enter into an inner, *mystical* understanding of God's being, and His presence in our lives. Through the darkening of our reasoning powers, an intuitional knowledge of God can bring direct and immediate experience of His

What would be impossible for two married persons now becomes possible because they discover by faith Jesus Christ in their body, soul, and spirit encounters.

presence. The *mystery* of the Trinity and the Incarnation opens us up to experience the Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love.

Marriage is a mystery insofar as the deepest understanding of its purpose lies outside of our human logic. It is in a constant state of conversion, of purifying one's heart, that the mystical understanding of marriage is given: that marriage is a sacramental encounter with Jesus Christ.

In marriage Jesus gives Himself to two persons. They can share, if they open up to His presence in their daily lives, in His love and freeing power. They can actually experience, in their own self-giving to each other, the very self-giving of God. Paul tells us this is a great mystery.

As Christ has given Himself to the Church, His Bride, so the husband and wife are to give themselves totally and completely, permanently and exclusively to each other without any reservation or selfishness. But Christian marriage is a sacrament, built upon contemplation of the indwelling Trinity in the mutual love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by the two married persons. It works on a daily basis when it is



entered into in faith, and lived out by Christians who have an awareness that in every aspect of their marital life they can meet Jesus Christ.

It is He and His Holy Spirit who transform each natural joy and suffering, doubt and fear, by giving it new meaning and new life. He is present with His resurrectional victory over sin and death. What would be impossible on a strictly human level for two married persons to cope with and develop into a humanizing, fulfilling experience now becomes possible because they discover by faith Jesus Christ in their body, soul, and spirit encounters. True Christian marriage discards the ugly separation or exclusion of God from any area of married life, especially from the sexual life of husband and wife.

By encountering the total self-giving of Jesus in their loving surrender to each other, the couple is open to find Him operating powerfully and in a transforming way in the very materiality of their mutual love. Lips do not kiss, but two human beings in love do. Two bodies do not copulate, but a husband and wife act out their total, permanent commitment in love toward each other in a body, soul, spirit intercourse.

Through this conjugal act, human beings affirm and act out their inner psychic and spiritual oneness through two bodies becoming one. When such an act is holistic and involves the entire two persons on *all* levels of their

being, they mutually transcend the limitations of their human love.

If the husband and wife contemplate their human body as not separated from the soul, but as the whole person expressing, through the body, the Holy Spirit's love, the physical intercourse becomes a sacred act of mystical union with God and with each other. In marital love, man and woman are gifted to love the other somewhat as God loves us, in a beautiful hope of what is yet unseen, but could be. The one loved has not yet experienced himself or herself as that good, noble, or beautiful person, yet in the eyes of the lover he or she is already that lovable, unique person.

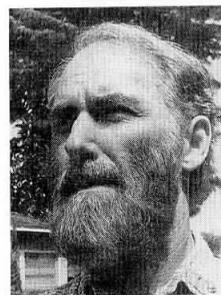
For those who have learned to let go of their hold on their own lives and have taken the risk of hoping in the goodness of the other by being "vulnerable," and at the

In marital love, man and woman are gifted to love the other somewhat as God loves us, in a beautiful hope of what is yet unseen, but could be.

complete service of the one loved, great riches of contemplation can begin to be experienced.

Since we know that God is a global presence, yet One who is distinct from the two loved ones, but who nevertheless can never be separated from them, their joy in each other is a taste of the joys of Heaven. It is more than the experience of two members forming a oneness—"bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh"—it is the basic experience of the Church, two members forming a oneness *in* Christ.

True love is contemplation and true contemplation is always true Christian love. □



George Maloney was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and ordained in 1957 in Rome as a priest of the Russian Byzantine Rite. He earned a doctorate in Oriental Theology in 1962. He has established himself as an outstanding author of works on prayer and Eastern Christian spirituality as applied to the daily life of Western Christians. He has written more than fifty books. George Maloney now resides in Seal Beach, California, where he is affiliated with Contemplative Ministries.

Centered Living

by Basil Pennington

The aim of Centering Prayer is not to find twenty minutes of bliss twice a day. This return to the Center—this embrace of God—is the sourcing of life, leading to a whole other way of living.

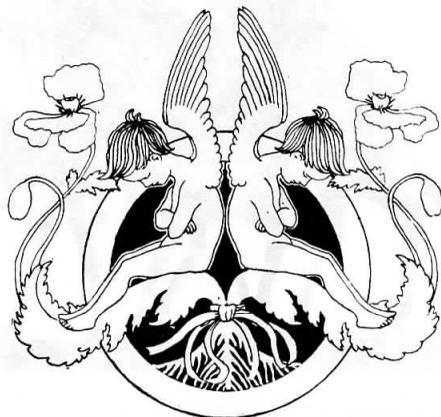
IF CENTERING PRAYER is so refreshing and, indeed, refreshes one's entire life with those wonderful fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, benignity—oh, yes, and long-suffering—well, where is the suffering, where is the Cross? Our Master has said: "If you would be My disciple you must take up your Cross daily"—not weekly or monthly, but daily. The Cross must be a daily part of Christian life. Well, where is it in a Centered life?

First of all, part of our daily Cross may lie in making time for our Centering Prayer. All of us live or can live very full lives.

To make time for our Centering Prayer, we have to make the choice for God. We have to give some of our precious time—which is something of the very substance of our life. The choice usually means giving up some other good thing that we could be doing with that time. And not necessarily for ourselves, but some of the good things we could be doing for others.

That is oftentimes more difficult than giving up our own pleasures. There is a real choice here and a real sacrifice—a bit of the Cross. Especially when we do not feel like Centering or when the Prayer seems to be leading us only into darkness and desert, into the cloud of unknowing. Fidelity to practice can be a real walking with Christ, a faithful carrying of the daily Cross.

The aim of Centering Prayer is not to find twenty minutes of bliss twice a day. It is not to find some



sort of escape, that we might use more and more. This return to the Center, this embrace of God is the sourcing of life, the transformation of life, the birth of compassion leading to another whole way of living. The choices we make in Centering Prayer follow through into life. The option for God before all else or in all else becomes the force of our life.

As we come to know by experience our oneness with each and every person, and also the potential goodness and happiness that is available to fill the life of each, we enter more and more into the compassion of Christ which is at the heart of His Passion. We love more deeply and more universally. We see more exquisitely how people cause themselves to suffer because they do not know their own beauty and loveliness, God's immense love for them, and the meaning of their lives.

Fidelity to Centering Prayer will not only bring us a deepening joy but also a deepening share in all the suffering of our human race, of our desecrated earth. For we come to love the earth, too—the footstool of

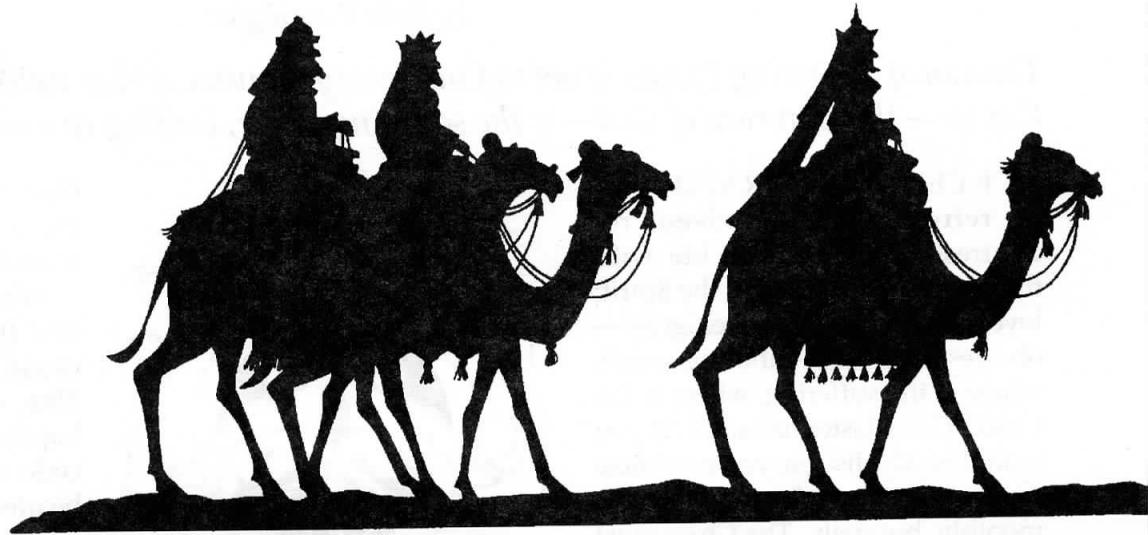
God. No—the throne of God, where He enthrones His beloved children who share His own divineness.

Where is the Cross in a Centered life? It is where Jesus found it, because we have become more like Him, our true selves, Christed in baptism. With Him we weep, intercede, and offer up the splinters and beams of the Cross that the Father allows to be placed on our shoulders or invites us to carry with the Christ in others, as did Simon of Cyrene.

Centering Prayer does not take the Cross out of life. But it opens us to experience one of the incomprehensible elements of the mystery of the Cross. In Centering Prayer we are brought into the experience of the mystery of the Cross and allowed to share in it. This happens when we come to know in the depths of our being the presence and love of God which fills us with abiding and abounding joy, even while compassion brings into us an ever fuller share in the sufferings of the human family and of all the earth.

Here is the Cross in Centering Prayer: arms stretching out horizontally to embrace the whole of the cosmos in all its groanings, a life deeply planted in the Center of heaven, in the Center of God, a life reaching vertically up into the very heights of divine Life and Love and Being. □

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The Three Fools

by Mike Mason

THE THREE WISE men (as everyone knows but likes to forget) did not visit Jesus in the manger as a baby. They found Him much later, living in a shanty on the outskirts of Bethlehem, when He was two years old. This is important.

They knew they were looking for a child, and this was a matter of some awkwardness for them. They wondered: What sort of behavior would be appropriate in the presence of a child-king? They pictured themselves kneeling, presenting their gifts, and then perhaps sitting stiffly on the edge of wooden chairs and sipping tea. Their conversations would be mainly with the parents, of course, while the child looked on serenely, wonderingly. With careful humility they would avoid His large, omniscient eyes.

This is not how things turned out.

These men were bachelors, remember. Monkish types. Contemplatives used to sitting on their duffs and reaching after the ineffable with their noggins.

What could they possibly know about the terrible two's?

How surprised they were to find their little King

blazing around the house in a torn toga, chattering up a storm, and leaping onto their laps to tweak their beards! Even more surprising, they found they did not react to these improprieties with horror. Instead they felt all the stiffness draining out them, lifetimes of reverent caution (i.e., distrust) melting like marshmallow in hot chocolate. They were charmed, delighted, won. Truly and deeply.

In no time they found themselves regressing, relaxing back into the childhoods they had never had. They got down on their knees, all right, but it wasn't to worship—it was to give the Kid camel rides on their backs, and then to roll over like great fat bears while the Boy who had made the universe used their bellies for trampolines. They fell down before their King, yet not in some formal act of prostration, but bowled over like ninepins by the thunder of a child's chortle.

People who have had no childhoods are old at forty. They have lived their lives, they can see no way forward. There is nothing left for them but to go back, back where they have never been. This prospect is terribly frightening. Imagine—being frightened of



becoming a child! It's like being frightened of ice cream.

But just so did things stand with the magi. Even the stars—which to the Boy King were like so many marbles, so many toy jewels for scattering and gathering—were to these men objects of utmost seriousness. Had they not given themselves to following a star, believing this to be the great high purpose of their lives? And where had it gotten them? Rolling around in their sumptuous robes on the dirt floor of a hovel, that's where. Squealing like pigs, hooting till their sides fairly split, squirting out buckets of snotty tears. Ripping open their fine silks and brocades so that the holy little Hoodlum could blow trumpet kisses into their bare tums. Years later they would still feel the amazing soft violence of His kiss in their navels, as if He really had found an aperture there and played them like an instrument, blown them full of brassy jubilation.

"Say, little Fellow, you're really full of beans, aren't You?"

"You better believe I am!" said His laughing eyes. "Now you open wide your mouths, your ears, your hands and your hearts, because I'm going to fill you up with beans too."

And He did. They gave Him their tawdry treasures; He gave them beans. A bean for rib-tickling; a bean for wrestling; a bean for giggling and guffawing; a bean for innocence and dance; a bean for indignity.

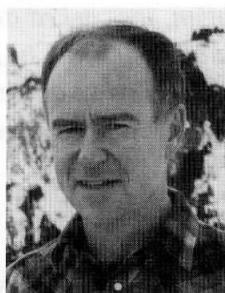
Did the magi know beyond doubt that they had found their King? Oh, yes, they knew! They knew it

when the little Guy sat astride their backs, smacked them on the rumps and cried, "Giddyup, Frankincense! Mush, Myrrh! Hi ho, Gold—away!"

"Jesus, hon," His mother kept saying, "don't embarrass the nice men."

But He was born to embarrass nice men, to embarrass them with riches. All day long the great sages lay in the dirt collapsed in ecstasy, slain by the spirit of the Urchin. All night they lay there, too, babbling in tongues, humming snatches of psalms and Mother Goose, burbling musically like babes. That night the greatest astrologers of the ancient world literally saw stars—saw them for the first time, as they are, rolling around heaven to a Toddler's tune.

These men who had come to pray, ended in play. They came to give gifts, but ended by leaving what they had long ached to be rid of: starched collars, tinsel crowns, jaded adult wisdom. Wise men turned into wise guys, jokers. They became fools—fools for Christ. □



Mike Mason lives with his wife, Karen, and their daughter, Heather, in Langley, BC, Canada. He is the author of several books and many short stories, and is active in the Anglican lay ministry.

The Fruits of Contemplation



Its fruits? A sense of rightness about life. Increasing hope of life for everyone. Great communion with sisters and brothers everywhere, of all times, past, present and future. Joy that never stays away for long. New skills that I like: chopping wood, modest carpentry, writing music for the Word that sustains me. A poor spirit at peace.

—Jane Richardson

My heart was tender and often contrite, and universal love for my fellow creatures increased in me... I felt myself to be inextricably mixed with all suffering humanity.

—John Woolman



Contemplation is a gift that makes a person human and needs no other fruits for its justification. Because I am a person, I am potentially a contemplative animal and that is all there is to it.

—Douglas Steere

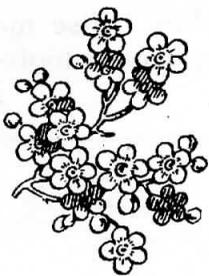


The gifts of contemplation return our capacity to see things as they are, and to insist that any attempt at grasping an ultimate unity in things must be achieved only after there is the deepest reverence given to the untamable mystery in all things.

—Douglas Steere

I do not think there is anyone who takes quite such fierce pleasure in things being themselves as I do. The startling wetness of water excites and intoxicates me; the fierceness of fire; the steeliness of steel; the unalterable muddiness of mud.

—G. K. Chesterton

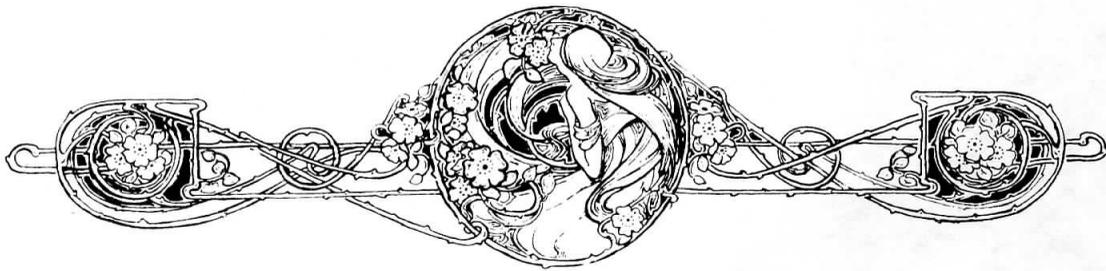


When Dōgen, the father of the Soto school of Japanese Zen Buddhism, was asked on his return in 1227 from spending many years in China with great Zen masters, what he had learned in all this time he had been away, Dōgen replied, "O nothing much, just softness of heart!"

—Douglas Steere



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Wholly United to God

by Julian of Norwich

AND SO IN all this contemplation it seemed to me that it was necessary to see and to know that we are sinners and commit many evil deeds which we ought to forsake, and leave many good deeds undone which we ought to do, so that we deserve pain, blame and wrath. And despite all this, I saw truly that our Lord was never angry, and never will be. Because He is God, He is good, He is truth, He is love, He is peace; and His power, His wisdom, His charity and His unity do not allow Him to be angry.

For I saw truly that it is against the property of His power to be angry, and against the property of His wisdom and against the property of His goodness. God is that goodness which cannot be angry, for God is nothing but goodness. Our soul is united to Him who is unchangeable goodness. And between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness in His sight. For our soul is so wholly united to God, through His own goodness, that between God and our soul nothing can interpose. □

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The Heartbeat of God

by Brennan Manning

I believe that the night in the Upper Room was the defining moment of John's life. As John leans back on the breast of Jesus and listens to the heartbeat of the Great Rabbi, he comes to know Him in a way that surpasses mere cognitive knowledge. In a flash of intuitive understanding, John experiences Jesus as the human face of God who is love.

THE STORY IS told of a very pious Jewish couple. They had married with great love, and the love never died. Their greatest hope was to have a child so their love could walk the earth with joy. Yet there were difficulties. And since they were very pious, they prayed and prayed and prayed. Along with considerable other efforts, lo and behold, the wife conceived. When

she conceived, she laughed louder than Sarah laughed when she conceived Isaac. And the child leapt in her womb more joyously than John leapt in the womb of Elizabeth when Mary visited her. And nine months later a delightful little boy came rumbling into the world.

They named him Mordecai. He was rambunctious, zestful, gulping down the days and dreaming

through the nights. The sun and the moon were his toys. He grew in age and wisdom and grace, until it was time to go to the synagogue and learn the Word of God.

The night before his studies were to begin, his parents sat Mordecai down and told him how important the Word of God was. They stressed that without the Word of God Mordecai would be an autumn leaf

in the winter's wind. He listened wide-eyed.

Yet the next day he never arrived at the synagogue. Instead he found himself in the woods, swimming in the lake and climbing the trees.

When he came home that night, the news had spread throughout the small village. Everyone knew of

"I first learned the Word of God when the Great Rabbi held me silently against His heart."

his shame. His parents were beside themselves. They did not know what to do.

So they called in behavior modificationists to modify Mordecai's behavior, until there was no behavior of Mordecai that was not modified. Nevertheless, the next day he found himself in the woods, swimming in the lake and climbing the trees.

So they called in the psychoanalysts, who unblocked Mordecai's blockages, so there were no more blocks for Mordecai to be blocked by. Nevertheless, he found himself the next day, swimming in the lake and climbing the trees.

His parents grieved for their beloved son. There seemed to be no hope.

At the same time the Great Rabbi visited the village. And the parents said, "Ah! Perhaps the Rabbi." So they took Mordecai to the Rabbi and told him their tale of woe. The Rabbi bellowed, "Leave the boy with me, and I will have a talking with him."

It was bad enough that Mordecai

would not go to the synagogue. But to leave their beloved son alone with this lion of a man was terrifying. However, they had come this far, and so they left him.

Now Mordecai stood in the hallway, and the Great Rabbi stood in his parlor. He beckoned, "Boy, come here." Trembling, Mordecai came forward.

And then the Great Rabbi picked him up and held him silently against his heart.

His parents came to get Mordecai, and they took him home. The next day he went to the synagogue to learn the Word of God. And when he was done, he went to the woods. And the Word of God became one with the words of the woods, which became one with the words of Mordecai. And he swam in the lake. And the Word of God became one with the words of the lake, which became one with the words of Mordecai. And he climbed the trees. And the Word of God became one with the words of the trees, which became one with the words of Mordecai.

And Mordecai himself grew up to become a great man. People who were seized with panic came to him and found peace. People who were without anybody came to him and found communion. People with no exits came to him and found a way out. And when they came to him he said, "I first learned the Word of God when the Great Rabbi held me silently against his heart." (Story from John Shea's, *Starlight*.)

The heart is traditionally understood as the locus of emotions from which strong feelings such as love and hatred arise. However, this limited description of the heart as the seat of the affections limits it to one dimension of the total self. Obviously this is not all we have in mind when we pray, "Create in me a clean

heart, O Lord," or what God meant when He spoke through the mouth of Jeremiah, "Deep within them I will plant My Law, writing it on their hearts," or what Jesus meant when He said, "Happy the pure in heart."

The heart is the symbol we employ to capture the deepest essence of personhood. It symbolizes what lies at the core of our being; it defines irreducibly who we really are. We can know and be known only through revealing the revelation of what is in our heart.

When Mordecai listened to the heartbeat of the Great Rabbi, he heard more than the systole and diastole of a palpitating human organ. He penetrated the Rabbi's consciousness, entered into his subjectivity and came to know the Rabbi in a way that embraced intellect and emotion—and transcended

For John the heart of Christianity was not an inherited doctrine but a message born of his own experience.

them. Heart spoke to heart. Consider Blaise Pascal's provocative statement: "The heart has her reasons about which the mind knows nothing."

On a recent five-day silent retreat, I spent the entire time in John's Gospel. Whenever a sentence caused my heart to stir I wrote it out longhand in a journal. The first of many entries was also the last: "The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus.... He leaned back on Jesus' breast."

We must not hurry past this scene

in search of deeper revelation, or we will miss a magnificent insight. John lays his head on the heart of God, on the breast of the Man whom the council of Nicea defined as "being co-equal and consubstantial to the Father...God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God." This passage should not be

The recovery of passion begins with the recovery of my true self as the beloved.

reduced to a historical memory. It can become a personal encounter, radically affecting our understanding of who God is and what our relationship with Jesus is meant to be. God allows a young Jew, reclining in the rags of his twenty-odd years, to listen to His heartbeat!

Have we ever seen the human Jesus at closer range?

Clearly, John was not intimidated by Jesus. He was not afraid of his Lord and Master. The Jesus John knew was not a hooded mystic abstracted by heavenly visions or a spectral face on a holy card with long hair and a flowing robe. John was deeply affected by this sacred Man.

Fearing that I would miss the divinity of Jesus, I distanced myself from His humanity, like an ancient worshiper shielding his eyes from the holy of holies. My uneasiness betrays a strange hesitancy of belief, an uncertain apprehension of a remote Deity, rather than intimate confidence in a personal Savior.

As John leans back on the breast of Jesus and listens to the heartbeat of the Great Rabbi, he comes to know

Him in a way that surpasses mere cognitive knowledge.

What a world of difference lies between *knowing about* someone and *knowing Him!* We may know all about someone—name, place of birth, family of origin, educational background, habits, appearance—but all those vital statistics tell us nothing about the person who lives and loves and walks with God.

In a flash of intuitive understanding, John experiences Jesus as the human face of the God who is love. And in coming to know who the Great Rabbi is, John discovers who *he is*—the disciple Jesus loved. Years later, the evangelist would write, "In love there can be no fear, but fear is driven out by perfect love: because to fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love."

Not only did the beloved disciple come to know Jesus, but the meaning of all that Jesus had taught suddenly exploded like a starburst. "I first learned the Word of God when the Great Rabbi held me silently against His heart." For John, the heart of Christianity was not an inherited doctrine but a message born of his own experience. And the message he declared was, "God is love."

Philosopher Bernard Lonergan once noted: "All religious experience at its roots is an experience of an unconditional and unrestricted being in love."

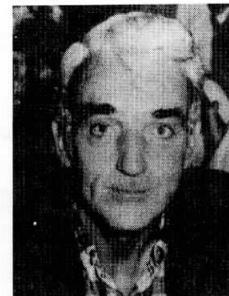
The recovery of passion begins with the recovery of my true self as the beloved. If I find Christ I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him. This is the goal and purpose of our lives. John did not believe that Jesus was the most important thing; he believed that Jesus was the *only* thing. For "the disciple Jesus loved," anything less was not genuine faith.

I believe that the night in the Upper Room was the defining moment of John's life. Some sixty years after Christ's resurrection, the Apostle—like an old gold miner panning the stream of his memories—recalled all that had transpired during his three-year association with Jesus. He made pointed references to that holy night when it all came together, and he affirmed his core identity with these words: "Peter turned and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them—the one who had leaned on His breast at the Supper."

If John were to be asked, "What is your primary identity, your most coherent sense of yourself?" he would not reply, "I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist," but "I am the one Jesus loves."

To read John's account of the Last Supper without faith is to read it without profit. To risk the passionate life, we must be "affected by" Jesus as John was; we must engage His experience with our lives rather than with our memories—we must lay our heads on Jesus' breast, listen to His heartbeat, and personally appropriate the Christ-experience. □

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Born in New York City during the Depression, Brennan Manning now lives with his wife Roslyn Ann in New Orleans. A former Franciscan priest, he is the author of several books, as well as a retreat leader who travels widely encouraging people everywhere to accept and embrace the good news of God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ.



God in the Midst

God is present with us—let us fall and worship,
Holy is the place;
God is in the midst, our souls are silent,
Bowed before His Face.

Lord, we kneel before Thee,
Awed by love Divine,
We of Thee unworthy
Own that we are Thine.



Gladly cast before Thee all delights and pleasures,
All our hoarded store—
Lord, behold our hearts, our souls, and bodies,
Thine, and ours no more.

We, O God, Thine only,
Nevermore our own—
Thine the praise and honour,
Thine, and Thine alone.

Thou Who fillest all things, in Thee, living, moving,
Evermore are we;
Shoreless sea unsounded, mystery and wonder,
Sinks my soul in Thee—

I in Thee—no longer
Bound in self's dark prison,
And the life that moves me,
Fills me, Christ arisen.



—Gerhardt Ter Steegen

Potpourri



You should bother less about what you ought to do, and think more about what you ought to be, because if your *being* were good, then your work would shine forth brightly.

—Meister Eckhart

A small green apple cannot ripen in one night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe and juicy beside its small green counterparts. Like the birth of a baby or the opening of a rose, the birth of the true self takes place in God's time. We must wait for God, we must be awake; we must trust His hidden action within us.

—James Finley



To pray is to open oneself to the possibility of sainthood, to the possibility of becoming set on fire by the Spirit.

—Anonymous

The Christian of the future will have to become a mystic—someone who has experienced something or Someone—or he or she will be nothing at all.

—Karl Rahner



Faith is an active, reckless confidence in God's goodness.

—Martin Luther



May the Lord preserve in me a burning love for the world and a great gentleness.

—Teilhard de Chardin



Children always challenge me to live in the present. I marvel at their ability to be fully present to me. Their uninhibited expression of affection and their willingness to receive it pull me directly into the moment and invite me to celebrate life where it is found. Whereas in the past coming home meant time to study, to write letters, and to prepare for classes, it now first of all means time to play.

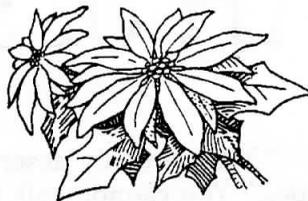
—Henri Nouwen

Faith is the courage to accept God's total acceptance of each of us.

—Paul Tillich

Don't think, look!

—Wittgenstein



Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the spirit of love.

—John of the Cross



The Art of Seeing

by Henri Nouwen

ONE NAME ROME certainly deserves is "the city of statues." You cannot walk for long in the streets of Rome without encountering some marble character who reminds you that you are only a freshman in the school of history. Some of these characters are playful, others fierce; some beautiful, others ugly; some sensual, others spiritual. On one of these walks I met the little stone elephant with an Egyptian obelisk on his back. Looking at this cozy animal, I was reminded of a short story.

There once was a sculptor working hard with his hammer and chisel on a large block of marble. A little boy who was watching him saw nothing more than large and small pieces of stone falling away left and right. He had no idea what was happening. But when the boy returned to the studio a few weeks later, he saw to his great surprise a large, powerful lion sitting in the place where the marble had stood. With great excitement the boy ran to the sculptor and said, "Sir, tell me, how did you know there was a lion in the marble?"

The art of sculpture is, first of all, the art of seeing. In one block of marble, Michelangelo saw a loving mother carrying her dead son on her lap; in another, he saw a self-confident David ready to hurl his stone at the approaching Goliath; and in a third, he saw an irate Moses at the point of rising in anger from his seat. Visual art is indeed the art of seeing, and discipline is the way to make visible what has been seen. Thus, the skillful artist is a liberator who frees from their bondage the figures that have been hidden for billions of years inside the marble, unable to reveal their true identity.

The image of the sculptor offers us a beautiful illustration of the relationship between contemplation and ministry. To contemplate is to *see*, and to minister is to *make visible*; the contemplative life is a life with a vision, and the life of ministry is a life in which this vision is revealed to others.

I arrived at this definition through the writings of Evagrius Ponticus, one of the Desert Fathers who had great influence on monastic spirituality in the East and the West. Evagrius calls contemplation a *theoria physike*, which means a vision (*theoria*) of the nature of things (*physike*).

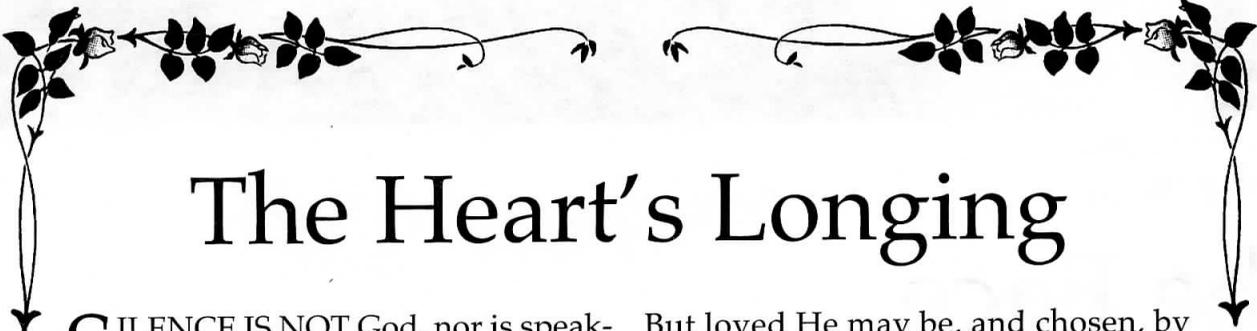
The contemplative is someone who sees things for what they really are, who sees the real connections,

who knows—as Thomas Merton used to say—“what the scoop” is. To attain such a vision, a spiritual discipline is necessary. Evagrius calls this discipline the *praktike*. It is the taking away of the blindfolds that prevent us from seeing clearly.

Merton, who was very familiar with Evagrius' thinking, expressed the same idea when he said, in a conference with the monks at the Gethsemani Abbey, that the contemplative life is a life in which we constantly move from opaqueness to transparency, from the place where things are dark, thick, impenetrable, and closed to the place where these same things are translucent, open, and offer vision far beyond themselves. □

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Henri Nouwen was born in the Netherlands, where he was ordained to the priesthood. He taught in the U.S., at the University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School, and Harvard Divinity School; and in Italy, at the North American College in Rome. In 1986 he joined DAYBREAK, the L'Arche community for the mentally-handicapped in Toronto, Canada, begun by Jean Vanier. The author of a number of books on the spiritual life, Henri Nouwen died in 1997.



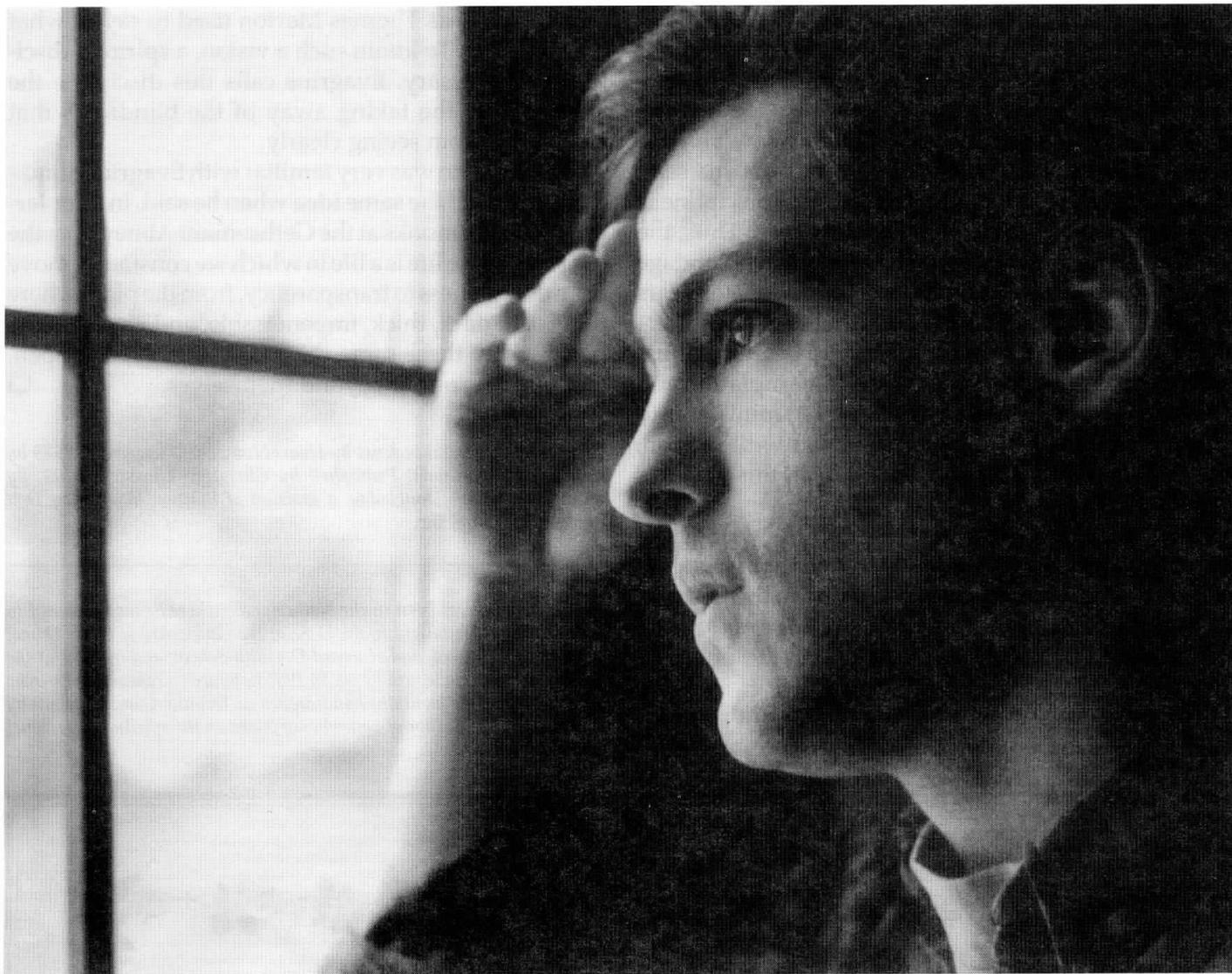
The Heart's Longing

SILENCE IS NOT God, nor is speaking; fasting is not God, nor is feasting; solitude is not God, nor is company.... He lies hidden between them, and no work of yours can possibly discover Him save only your heart's love. Reason cannot fully know Him—for He cannot be thought, possessed or discovered by the mind.

But loved He may be, and chosen, by the artless, affectionate longing of your heart. Choose Him, then, and you will find that your speech is become silent, your silence eloquent, your fasting a feast, your feasting a fast, and so on. Choose God in love.... For this blind thrust, this keen shaft of longing love will never miss the mark of God. □

—Unknown

From THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING.



Looking into ...

The Face of Christ

by Marian Scheele

When the soul is occupied with looking away from present trials into the face of Christ, and making this a regular and passionate occupation, this soul will become more tranquil and still, and therefore more able to reflect the Being it adores. This reflected glory will enable us to love our neighbor as ourselves. The only effort required is the giving up of all effort.

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing
in your voices!

—Browning

Under all speech that is good for
anything there lies a silence
that is better.

Silence is deep as eternity;
speech is shallow as time.

—Thomas Carlisle

Be silent before the Lord, all mankind.

—Zechariah 2:13

“SO FULL OF dreary noises” indeed! If Browning could have foreseen the world today, he no doubt would decide that he lived in a paradise of silence. Noise, and speed, and furious activity abound in these last days so that the hearts of all are weary with the weight of this enormous pressure.

In a mind-boggling exchange on a recent television panel, the new telephone technologies were being discussed. Some of the more astute debaters—those who had not lost their bearings on the dizzying highway of exigent speed—protested that the new possibilities for speedier communication were not worth the concomitant loss of privacy that would be inevitable. But the CEO of a telephonic communication company insisted that loss of privacy was not worth considering when (oh, marvel!) here before our eyes lay the possibility of getting information more quickly, with the new technology his company was making available. Who could seriously question such an exciting concept?

Sad to say, hardly anyone would dare. The sound and fury that demand ever speedier communication are too loud and ubiquitous. There is no time for silently questioning the need to do everything with

alacrity. The world, of course, has lost its way, and the dizzying freeway to nowhere on which it is traveling does not allow for any off-ramps for solitude. Even when people are gratuitously afforded a bit of space for reflection—a taste of stillness—they hasten to fill it with noise, lest someone catch them ruminating. There may be time for us to recharge the batteries of the mind—which are running on empty—on our drive homeward, but it is easier to push a button and fill the silence with music or news reports, thereby obviating any chance for assessing the day—or one’s place in the universe.

This is a society that does not examine itself; there is no time for such a luxury. Only little children seem to have it right. They know the necessity of doing nothing. Some years ago, Robert P. Smith wrote a book with the title, *Where Did You Go? “Out.” What did you do? “Nothing.”* Every parent has had this conversation with a child.

Children know instinctively that dreaming, meditating, doing nothing, are absolutely vital for getting in touch with reality. But of course teachers and parents knock that silly notion out of their heads—and the sooner the better.

Alan Watts gave a lecture once, illustrating with a few words how quickly this can be accomplished. He told how a small child comes to school, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, eager to learn. Then the teacher says, “Pay attention!” And Watts pantomimed how the child’s body stiffens with the enormous effort to follow

*Children know instinctively that
dreaming, meditating, doing nothing,
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in touch with reality.*

this command, and his eyes glaze over as he strains to conform. From now on, he will not be allowed to dream and question; he will lose forever the joy of learning with which he came into this world.

This happens to all of us, and it affects our walk with God. The modern pursuit of knowledge without understanding has resulted in a great irony: the only light from the huge explosion of technology is one that clarifies the fact that we, as a society, and as a Church,

The Face of Christ cont.

are bereft of inner illumination, and therefore unable to solve our problems. But God, as Joseph told his brothers, means it for good. Out of a terrible hunger and need, many will seek God, and hopefully will find Him in silent contemplation.

The churches today are largely characterized by a prevailing need to be busy and useful. We need to be "useful" of course, but this pragmatism must come out of mysticism. In other words, before any work of God

We, as a society, and as a Church, are bereft of inner illumination, and therefore unable to solve our problems.

can be truly "useful" it must have *originated with Him*, coming out of deep acknowledgment that we don't know what to do, and a determination to follow the leading of the Spirit. This is something that we will never do perfectly, but it is something we cannot do at all unless we have come to know Christ as our very life. The inner place where He dwells is known only to Him; it is hidden even from ourselves, and so we must listen with an inward ear in a silent "unknowing."

Today, especially, I think it is not easy for any of us to practice silent contemplation, where we come—alone and wordless—into the presence of Christ, waiting there for the Mystery to be made known to us. But God *has allowed this difficulty* and planned from eternity to do for us what we find impossible. He knew that the world would be so much with us, so much a reality to us, that He instructed Paul to write:

By our faith the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems, and in our praying. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how to pray as we should, but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feeling that it cannot be expressed in words.

Romans 8:26

In contemplative prayer, that is what we do: look to the Holy Spirit to do that which we cannot do for ourselves. And we contemplate His glory, and His mercy, and His ways that are past finding out. It is not given to us to unravel the mystery; we need only believe. What a sublime relief it is to agree with Him,

and to know that He does not expect us to know anything. In silent contemplation, the intellect is bypassed, and we are taken into a transcendent dimension understood only by the spirit. In silence, our spirit will recognize His Spirit.

As we open ourselves to timelessness, we will become aware that everything we want to know is hidden in "the cloud of unknowing." We have imagined that we are full of knowledge; now we see that we know nothing. But this is not a sad enlightenment: it is the door to knowing—the way to the heart of the Father, in which everything of love and kindness, of patience and wisdom, abide. It is the place where all that is in the Father will flow into our nothingness. This would not be possible had we still clung to our own knowing, being full of ourselves and the sound of our own voices. This *knowing* is from the Holy Spirit and will always be perfect, even though we may receive it imperfectly.

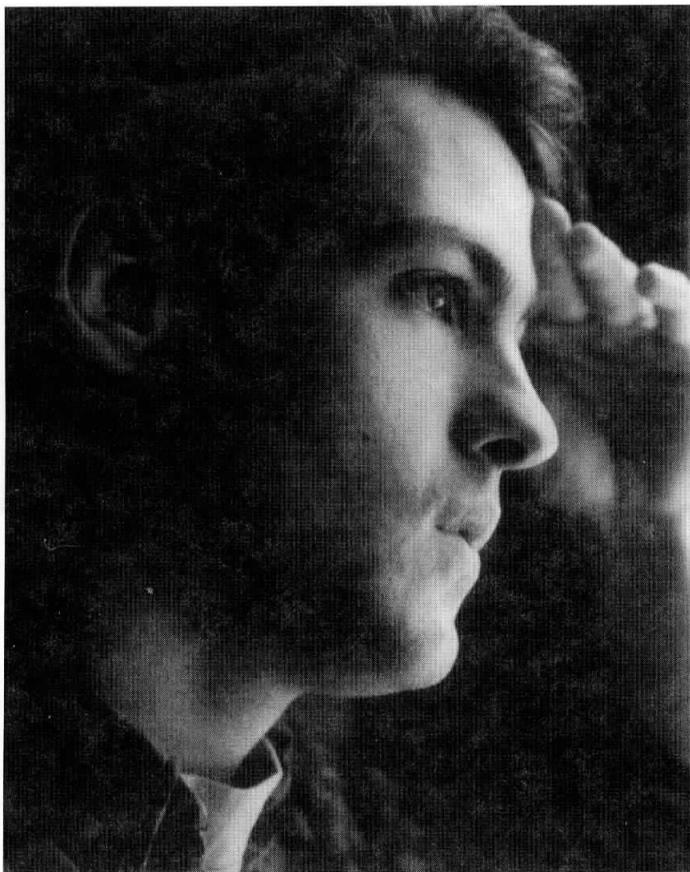
When the soul is occupied with looking away from present trials into the face of Christ, and making this a regular and passionate occupation, this soul will become more tranquil and still, and therefore more able to reflect the Being it adores.

This reflected glory (all of Him, none of our own) will enable us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have asked, "How can I love this person who is so unlovable? I have tried so many times and failed." The

In silent contemplation, the intellect is bypassed, and we are taken into a transcendent dimension understood only by the spirit. In silence, our spirit will recognize His Spirit.

truth is that we were never intended to have this ability; it only flows from the Vine into the branch. How happily we find that there is a way to become ever more firmly attached to the Vine—a way that is more delightful than we could have imagined. The only effort required is giving up all effort.

It is in this giving up that I find the freedom that has eluded me. When I give up my own knowing and wait in silence for His voice, I find the Truth in the deepest regions of my consciousness. And suddenly I can say, "So that is what Jesus meant when He said that the



only because he has dedicated his life to this one discipline. When we look at him, we do not see the sacrifices he has made, the pleasures he has given up, the time he has spent alone learning his art. And all of this for something temporal. How infinitely greater is the reward of a dedication and passion for the things of God.

As we obey the call, we discover that it is God Himself who not only invites us into the place of infinite delight, but has sent the Holy Spirit to make everything possible. Taking His hand, we walk with Him into the vast, silent regions of the heavens, and our speech is hushed because we realize that we have nothing to say. Job spoke many words of wisdom in his conversation with his friends, but when he saw God, there was an enormous silence.

It is an awesome thing to come into the presence of the living God. But, incredibly, this place of holiness is surprisingly familiar. Somehow, we feel that we have come home. Our nothingness is not a thing to be ashamed of. In our eager, childlike searching, we have come to a place where we are welcomed, forgiven, tenderly comforted. Someone is saying, "Come in! I have been waiting for you!"

Our prayers of intercession, our petitions, our expressions of thankfulness and praise—all of these are good and not to be neglected. But how much we miss when we do not go apart to be silent, leaving the world and our work and our earthly concerns, sinking down into that deep place where our Father is waiting to bless His beloved child.

This is not an esoteric practice, available to a privileged few. Our Father calls everyone to "come to the waters ... come buy and eat," especially "you who have no money," who are simply hungry and thirsty, and unutterably weary of the busyness that deprives you of knowing, deeply and truly, the rest that is easy and the burden that is light. As Phillips Brooks said:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! □

truth would make me free!" For freedom to have any meaning, I must have been enslaved to something, and now I see that I was bound by my own effort, and every move I made to free myself only tightened the cords that held me fast.

To experience this freedom in the Spirit, we must come daily to eat and drink with Him, learning to

As we obey the call, we discover that it is God Himself who not only invites us into the place of infinite delight, but has sent the Holy Spirit to make everything possible.

know and understand His voice. A skilled craftsman, who has spent years learning his trade, can do with great ease what most of us would find impossible. He makes it look easy, and we think, "Why can't I do the same thing?" And, indeed, it is easy for him, but



Marian Scheele, who is in her 80th year, lives with her daughter in Modesto, California. A widow, she has four children, eleven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Marian enjoys gardening, cooking, reading and writing.

The Love-Life of the Trinity

by William McNamara

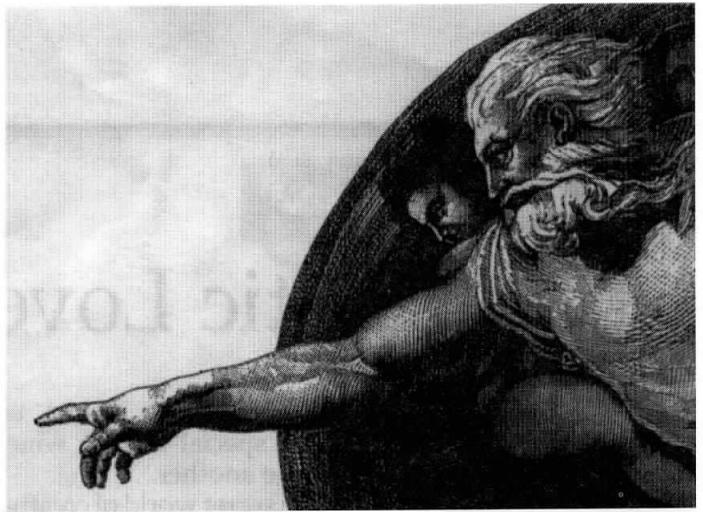
It is God who touches us and invites us into the intimate and infinite love-life of the Trinity.

THE ONLY WAY you can possess God is to be possessed by Him. The only way to enjoy Him is to let Him go. The only way to be heightened is to be humbled. The only way into the light of day is through the darkness of night. The only way to be divinely enriched is to be so poor you don't even have a god.

God, through the work of His hands (creation), takes hold of us; not the other way round. It is our grasping, acquisitive nature that spoils things. The beauty you leap upon dissolves under your dead weight. Clutch the splendor of a flame and you get burned; pluck a flower and it dies; scoop water from a brook and it flows no longer; snatch the wind in a bag and you have dead air. The more bloody determined you are to capture life and hold on to it, the more life will elude you and your own self-asserting effort imprison you.

To enjoy any living thing—fire, water, air, animal, vegetable, human, God Himself—we must let go of it. When we free it from our grasp, we, too, become free. In detachment is our liberation; and in our liberation the earth is hallowed and God is glorified.

Divine union is realized not by programs and practices cleverly devised or solemnly prescribed and religiously adhered to, but by a life of creative fidelity lived fully without bargaining, compromising, or holding back. In other words, realization of union with God is the graceful result of authentic human experience: life, deeply participated in and intelligently interpreted.



THE SALIENT [most striking] aspect of the spiritual life is a given one: union with God. We are endowed with Spirit from on high. There is no way that we can become identical with God. But we can become deified. We do not become totally human until we become partially divine. God became man so that man might become God. It is God who takes the initiative, unites Himself to us, keeps us alive by His creative and attentive presence and, with love, touches us where we are most free and invites us, seductively, into the intimate and infinite love-life of the Trinity.

What we need to do is sensitively recognize who we are—brides of the Bridegroom—and be aware of what is going on: we are being led to the bridal chamber.



THE REAL mission of the Church is to transform humans into God, into Christ-persons, or more accurately, to create and foster such a lively, human atmosphere, a climate so pregnantly divine, so significantly related to the Wholly Other, that the same Spirit of God who erupted in Jesus and turned Him into Christ the Lord will rise in us and form the contemporary Christ in us.

The Church has lots of jobs to do, but only one mission: the formation of saints. But the Church has failed its mission because most of its efforts are only remotely related to its central divine mandate: to pray and get the Gospel to every creature. □



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From The Mailbag

Compiled and edited by Claudia Volkman

I LOVE YOU, LORD!

I AM SO filled with joy and love, and the presence of my Lover is so real, that I am hardly able to contain myself. He is so beautiful, so sumptuous, so radiant, so everything! What a Lover!

After a recent retreat, I went home and started putting into practice what I learned about centering prayer. It seemed almost hopeless. So much internal noise, such internal chaos, but then things started settling down.

About two weeks ago I consciously realized that something was happening within me—my appetites were diminishing. I started asking the Holy Spirit to provide me with peace and internal quietude as He led me to my Lover—"Truth"—and He responded favorably. He gently and carefully led me into my Lover's embrace. "And the joy we share, as we tarry there *none* [all] others could know."

The world is beautiful, people are divine, and I weep for those who do not know how much He dearly loves them. Oh, that I could

be His mirror and show them—oh, that they would stop for awhile to listen to His words of endearment with which He calls, having no preferences but loving equally and desiring only that they share in His life, becoming co-creators with Him.

I thank God for you all, and I urge you to join with me in praying that we will love Him more; that every beat of our hearts would cry out, "I love you, Lord"; and every breath we take will be a plea for "more of you, my Love," to the end that we will be able to say with deep truth and conviction, experientially, "All of You, Lord, and none of me."

I spend time with Him three times a day: i.e., time exclusive of anyone else. He awakens me at 5:00 a.m. and bids me join Him on the floor of my bedroom. Then between 11:30 and 1:00 p.m.—on my lunch hour—He feeds my stomach, so that I am not hungry. This gives us a chance to make "passionate" love for my lunch break; and then at night I allow Him to love me some more and then drop off to sleep in His arms. Oh, what a life!

Name Withheld

MORE THAN I THINK I AM

IF FEW PEOPLE acknowledge the simple yet profound spirituality of *Basking in His Presence*, they don't know what they are missing. I am a monk living in a hermitage, and I have been in this spirituality business for 45 years of my life. I've searched high and low for a contemplative prayer message to share with people who are struggling in the world and yet not of it. That book takes the cake!

Merton, Keating, Shannon, etc., are personal mentors and deeply influential in my own life, but I've found that they are way too high-brow intellectually, theologically and philosophically for most people to plumb or be attracted to, because that is not their background—like it is for those called to dedicate their whole life to God in a religious vocation.

Contemplative prayer is a "hard sell" for everyone because humanity is so absorbed in and identified with their rational conceptual world. As Merton said, they think their ego-personality is the be-all and end-all of who they truly are. It seems to me that the conflict between our experiential True Self (Christ in us) and our false, empirical self causes an inner alienation which is the essence of original sin. The battle goes on, and I'm still learning that I'm more than I think I am! We are best nurtured by hanging out in God's loving Presence, which is the heart of *Union Life* and *Basking*.

I'm very grateful for your gift to me of *Abba's Child* with its evangelism of God's unconditional love. It is difficult for all of us to understand, and, more importantly, *experience* unconditional love, because we receive so

little of it from other people. Sadly, we are anthropomorphical people projecting our limited human behavior onto God. As they say, God made us in His image and now we are busy making God in our image.

Even if we understand unconditional love intellectually, we have trouble accepting it, because we are programmed to reject all free lunches. Being on God's welfare plan and accepting everything as His gratuitous and unearned gift is way too much for our proud, independent egos to buy.

And the bottom line is, if we do not experience God's love as unconditional, we are very slow to hang out with Him in the silence and solitude of our intimate love affair. The culture provides primarily social ideals and a myriad of escapes for those who can't stand themselves and hate to be alone—especially with God. It's easy to label solitude and silence as unsocial and abnormal.

Hell and brimstone preaching of God's wrath creates fear and doesn't work effectively for those who have a modicum of maturity. I've seen the immature be moved by fear, at least initially, when bad things happen to them. But, "Perfect love casts out fear." I'm sure that's why Christ's "Good News" is basically about love and not fear. Who are we to preach fear when Christ preached love? *Abba's Child* is a gem, and I'm very grateful that you shared it with me and put it on the *Union Life* book list.

We are not on a "high" all the time, nor should we desire to be so. That would be like seeking highs instead of God, and loving Him for ourself instead of for Himself. That's devastating to our

spiritual growth. I've found God makes sure we have our share of ups and downs on this exciting roller coaster of life, where everything is working together for good.

Name Withheld

DRY BREAD

FOR SEVEN YEARS my husband I have been practicing centering prayer, and last month I was ready to quit. Unlike some writers in *Union Life*, I haven't had any "felt" experiences of God's presence, passion, or love during my prayer time. In fact, all that I have ever had during those twenty minutes were boredom on one hand and bombardment of (and attachment to!) my endless thoughts on the other.

Fishing for some answers, I reread Thomas Keating's book, *Invitation to Love*. I discovered that my experience of drudgery and frustration was the norm rather than the exception. Father Keating calls this the "dry bread of faith" path as compared to the exuberant mystical path on which some others are blessed to travel. Both paths, he says, lead to transformative union.

Now that I understand this, I am determined to stick with my regular practice of contemplative prayer.

K.S. — Toms River, NJ

SOMETHING SWEET

THE TIMES I have spent in centering prayer have been such a blessing. The Lord is doing something sweet and precious during my time with Him.

M.K. — W. Seneca, NY

JOURNEY OF HEALING

I HEARD OF your ministry only a couple of weeks ago through my counselor at Exchanged Life Ministries. She gave me an article which I found most helpful.

I find your point of view most refreshing and simple, as I continue on my journey of healing from a past based on power, manipulation and control, and from numerous addictions, as well as from my experience of being sexually abused.

I am very interested in learning more about a peaceful, restful Christian life rather than one based on works.

Name Withheld

A SPRINGBOARD

THANKS SO MUCH for sending *Basking* and the back issues of *Union Life*.

Where do I start? I read the book first, and I'm blown away. Although I have known that I was always quickened by any contemplative work—Guyon, Merton, Nouwen—I didn't know where to go with it. This book is like a springboard into living waters. Thank you.

I'll be reading the magazines, one at a time, all the way through until I finish them—they will be well-marked and tabbed, just like the book.

I must say, though, that I would never recommend *Basking* to someone until they had read Bill's first book, *The Wink of Faith*. It is an important sequential study to first get a handle on the Christ-life.

Thanks again for sharing.

J.T. — Conroe, TX

We've had many interesting responses to our letter regarding our decision to stop publishing UNION LIFE magazine. Here is a sampling.

PURE SIMPLICITY

I AM SO sorry to hear that *Union Life* will be discontinued. It has been a great source of encouragement for me since I stumbled on it a couple of years ago.

I run to the articles when I need to be reminded of the pure simplicity of this God thing. I have had a major tendency to get caught up in trying to find a magic formula to find God.

N.B. — W. Palm Beach, FL

THE LIVING PRESENT

UNION LIFE WAS a divine breath of fresh air to so many, yet it indicates your spiritual maturity not to run beyond the Lord whose sweet fellowship was its theme and goal. Often the Church becomes so busy with service that it takes its eyes off the Master.

Union Life was a call to refocus, to re-“center.” But what now? The call to a *journey inward* is always for the *journey outward*. Church history witnesses to this perennial pendulum swing between *mysticism* and *activism*. It's no new experience, but perhaps, because of natural human enthusiasm, very necessary.

As I meditated on this, I recalled John Wesley's journey into Christian mysticism and how he turned what he learned outward into a very practical and needful evangelistic awakening. A decadent England was in no greater need of such a genuine spread of Gospel light

than is our modern dark age of materialistic self-centeredness. I also remembered the challenging poem of Longfellow, “Psalm of Life,” the last stanzas of which follow:

*In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!*

*Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!*

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

Union Life has left footprints that encourage many to “know the Lord” when all they've known is the Lord's work. But the far-reaching success of *Union Life* will not be the divorce of these from their false marriage to works.

True marital union with Christ is not barren. The practice of the intimate and fertile “wait” must result in pregnancy with its culminating “labor” and birth of holy service to others. This will be, in the retrospect of eternity, the lasting

benefit of *Union Life* to the Body of Christ, for here, as there, “His servants will serve Him” (Rev. 22:3).

D.H. — Sacramento, CA

FAITHFUL TO THE VISION

EVER SINCE WE learned that this is the last year for the publication of *Union Life* magazine I have been wondering how to express my appreciation for your faithfulness to the vision God gave you to make this magazine available.

Finally it dawned on me that what God is asking now is my own faithfulness to the vision *Union Life* has inspired. Year after year you have provided encouragement and confirmation to the expanding awareness of Christ in me, and from time to time I have shared the results in my personal life through letters and articles.

My husband and I loved the insert, “The Way Back Home” by Basil Pennington, in the Jan/Feb, 1998 issue and immediately began sharing it with others. But so few seemed to grasp the significance of establishing the habit of daily “basking in His presence,” as Bill Volkman so beautifully describes it in his book by that name. It's as if the demands of daily living crowd out time to think about and recognize the relationship between consciousness and experience.

I've come to the conclusion that it's time now for action rather than words to tell the good news of our oneness with the Fatherhood of God in Christ.

Our society knows little about the Fatherhood of God. Many of our problems seem to be rooted in the belief that we are separated, either physically or emotionally, from the integrity of authentic fatherhood. From experience, I know how devastating this "lie" can be as it affects succeeding generations of families.

What centering prayer has meant to me is the establishment of the daily practice of saying "no" to the lying appearance of absent fatherhood and "yes" to the truth that the Fatherhood of God in Jesus Christ is always with me in the present moment wherever I am. What is now exploding in my consciousness is a fresh awareness of what this means in practical ways of dealing with oppressive circumstances.

Recently I completed a course of instruction for volunteers at our local women's shelter for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. The common thread here is hostility between the sexes that has no existence whatsoever in the nature of God with whom we are one in union with Jesus Christ. A desire close to my heart is for women to know the truth that in receptivity to the immediate presence of the Fatherhood of God in Jesus Christ there is liberating freedom.

What is becoming clear is that God's best for me goes far beyond being available to answer a "hot line." It extends to the awareness of the resurrection life of Christ in His Body as a community of His friends.

Growth in understanding the truth of life in union with Christ has made me see that God's best is the Cross that joins the vertical and horizontal expressions of Himself in creative unity where male/female diversity is a blessing, not a curse.

But first there must be a vertical inner knowing of this truth that makes us free and comes from the daily discipline of time spent in relationship with Jesus Christ. Then comes the spontaneous outer horizontal expression of this reality as the spirit of community in positive action with others—where both men and women are valued as persons rather than as objects. Finally my husband and I are beginning to see little seeds of outer evidence of this truth beginning to sprout in our circumstances.

I feel as if we are on the threshold of a new adventure that I intend to record as it unfolds. Hopefully, before the year is over this record will become more widely shareable. The next step for me is the unexplored frontier of computer literacy with access to e-mail and the Internet. For now it is enough to say thank you for helping to make me increasingly aware that in Christ I am seated in the heavenlies as the object of the grace of my Father's perfect love that casts out fear.

With continued gratitude for the wonder of Life in union with Christ.

B.C.—Berwick, PA

MINISTRY OF LOVE

I READ WITH both sadness and acceptance the news that *Union Life* will no longer be coming to my mailbox.

There must be hundreds of people like me who are experiencing this loss; many who mean to express their appreciation for the countless hours of sacrificial labor that you all put into producing such a unique, first-class, free magazine, but haven't found the time to write yet.

How you have nurtured, inspired,

and challenged us over the years! I honestly don't know how you have been able to do it—except for God's enabling. A few times you even wrote me personal letters! Such a ministry of love!

I have confidence in your discernment of God's leading and pray for His continued provision and blessing to each of you. I cannot thank you enough for being willing to be His channel of blessing to me.

D.L.—Marysville, WA

OUR TURN NOW

I AM GOING to miss *Union Life* when you cease publication. The message of "Christ in you" is still missing in much of what we hear preached today.

Thank you for your long commitment and faithfulness to God's calling. Your ministry has revolutionized the lives of so many believers. Now it is our turn to share these truths with others.

L.R.—Waco, TX

FUTURE BLOSSOMS

I HAVE APPRECIATED your ministry over the years and am sorry in one respect to hear that this will be your last year publishing *Union Life*. But, as in the Old Testament, even if Aaron is taken away from his rod, in grace that rod will still produce buds. Yes, the magazine will be "taken away," but "buds" coming from the lives of those who have come to know and live from their union with Christ will remain and continue blossoming.

Your ministry has been much like that of John the Baptist, used to

point people to Christ as *the Life* (Gal. 2:20). For so many, you have been the forerunner, as John was, for people learning to be who they are in Christ. Thanks for your ministry in this respect in my life!

B.P. — Vero Beach, FL

ALONE WITH THE ALONE

OUR EASTER Alleluia's were loud and clear here when your good letter and past copies of *Union Life* arrived. A treasure of contemplative spirituality, which we deeply appreciate and owe to your thoughtful kindness.

The *Union Life* periodical is brimming with quality in every way—content, format, and printing. You guys have done a bang-up job for all these many years, though I'm sure the stress and pressure of deadlines have cost you many a gray hair. However, sharing your age-old wisdom with such a wide audience has surely made them vibrant and youthful in their interior God-search.

I'm so happy to know that you will continue your contemplative outreach through retreats and perhaps a website on the Internet.

I doubt seriously if we as humanity will ever fulfill our full potential as holistic, loving people until we access and awaken to the contemplative dimension in each of us. It's the only solution for a world looking for an answer to its enormous problems.

Karl Rahner's prediction that "unless we all become mystics we will be nothing at all" rings true for me with clarion accuracy. Otherwise we seem content to imprison ourselves in our familiar and superficial rational world where egocentricity flourishes ("nothing

at all") to the detriment of our experiential true Self. It almost takes an undercover operation to break through the crusty empirical world—and covert jobs are dangerous to ego security.

Your whole staff at *Union Life* has donated not only a rib but an arm and leg to the evolution of humanity's "expanding awareness of God's mystery—which is Christ in you." I'm sure *Union Life's* sacrificial contribution pointing to a new awareness of our intimate love union with God brought that gift of transcendent consciousness to fruition in a multitude of God-seekers. "Well, done, good and faithful servants."

We don't have Centering Prayer groups here in our hermitage. However, we have great respect for people like you and Thomas Keating in their hands-on efforts to help infuse the contemplative experience in the hearts of all Christians.

Our own life is centered around that same desire and endeavor, but in a different way through our solitude with God alone. Contemplative prayer is not merely a "means" for us, but an "end" in itself. If loving people is also loving God, then loving God directly is loving people, too—it works both ways.

We live in what Australians would call the Outback! Way out in the middle of nowhere. Fortunately God is nowhere because He's everywhere, otherwise these dense woods could be a very lonely place. Never less alone than when alone!

D.W. — Palestine, TX

UNION FOR COMMUNION

ALREADY I AM grieving for the announced concluding of the

publication of *Union Life* with the November/December issue this year. Although I never did write my own story to include, I have rejoiced with the growth of the emphasis toward *union for communion*, as you put it, and your growing emphasis on contemplation—centering and wordless prayer—as an avenue of this communion and "love affair" with the "indwelling Lover."

That has been very much my journey and the path through which change—what I would certainly call transformation—has been happening in me. This is a journey I cannot give up. Many that I know and work with do not understand what the Prayer of Silence means to me, but that matters not. This is where I need to be. This is where I've come to know most deeply that I am loved. This is where the fire is being kindled and burns within me and I am being changed.

Each issue of *Union Life* has come with witness that has confirmed the journey for me, and I've learned so much to help establish me in it. I appreciate this magazine and you!

H.S. — Carlsbad, CA

ALWAYS IN MISSION

IT IS WITH real sadness that I read of the demise of *Union Life*—at least the publication. It has been a source of great inspiration to me over the last few years, for you have chosen articles by my favorite authors.

Thank you for having stressed Centering Prayer. It was my good fortune to have a weekend with Thomas Keating. Centering prayer and silence, along with solitude, have grown in my appreciation the last fifteen years or so. The groups

Mailbag cont.

I now lead meet with me at a local monastery where we can experience all these.

Bless you and your future. I know you'll always be in mission.

M.V.P.—Decatur, GA

MOVED ON

I'M WRITING TO thank you all for your ministry of *Union Life* and to express my regrets it will be no more. I regret that I didn't take your ministry as seriously as I should have and obtained all the publications you've listed from time to time as recommended reading. I let the cares of the world get in the way of my heart. I hope I may still get some of the materials I've wanted but didn't get around to ordering.

But (and because of you) I have "moved on" in my union life walk and have become associated with the Order of Julian of Norwich, a contemplative religious order of the Episcopal Church. Centering prayer is an integral part of their Rule-of-Life, which encompasses vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and prayer.

Grace upon grace—and you helped. Thank you.

B.L.—Beaver Dam, WI

BLOWN AWAY

YOUR LETTER IN the Jan/Feb, '98, issue of *Union Life* almost "blew me away." I don't remember how long I've been receiving the magazine, and I can't imagine what it will be like to not receive it after this year.

But, thanks to you, I can understand where you "are coming from." What a foundation you have

helped me to discover, and also now the guidance into "wordless prayer" for love and transformation.

You have allowed the Lord to use you in such a magnificent way. We are grateful to Him and to you forever.

V.W.—St. Joseph, MO

A TIMELESS MESSAGE

LET ME PUT on record my very grateful thanks to you for

the blessing I have received from *Union Life*. When I first read of your intention to stop publication, I was stunned—it was almost like hearing of the death of a close friend.

I have read and re-read the pages of the magazine. Over the years, I have found so much encouragement in a way that no other publication I have seen could give, and I will continue to read them. They are timeless.

E.H.—Bugbrook,
Northamptonshire,
ENGLAND

P.S. from Claudia

I tend to procrastinate when it comes to writing a "P.S. from Claudia"—which is why, over the years, there have been so few of them! But this time my procrastination was heightened by the reality that this is my final P.S.

As you may imagine, it is difficult to put into words all I feel in my heart while working on this final issue of the magazine. When *Union Life* began in 1975, I was 21 years old and had just gotten married. This past week my eldest son celebrated his 21st birthday!

Being involved from the beginning with the message of *Union Life* has had a lot to do with my own growth and maturity. The truths presented over the years have shaped my faith in countless ways, and as the *Union Life* magazine evolved over these past years, so have I. I have a deep sense of gratitude that I've had the privilege of working on such a unique publication.

I feel incredibly blessed to have met so many wonderful people through this ministry—some only through their letters, in which they have sought to share with openness and authenticity the reality of Christ in them. The letters that found their way into the Mailbag each issue have been only a sampling of those we received—a small percentage of the heartfelt correspondence from all over the world that has touched my heart as well as our readers.

Although the magazine will no longer be published in written form, we can continue to share the reality of Christ's presence with each other via the Internet. Hey—maybe this won't be my *last* P.S. after all! □

A Final Word ...

Taking Flight

from Jan Ord



AS WE PUT the finishing touches to this, our final print issue of *Union Life*, and as I prepare to find “gainful employment” elsewhere, I’ve been pondering on what’s ahead.

My sense is that what’s ahead for us all is freedom, if we have the courage to grasp it. Freedom from the negative voices of our false self, telling us that we “need” something; freedom from feelings of guilt because we don’t measure up to our own expectations; freedom from the fear of failure; freedom from the untruth that we are not loveable.

Over the years, what we have tried to do in the pages of *Union Life* (and in the few books that we have published and recommended), is encourage all people everywhere to accept the truth of their union with Christ, as well as that they are truly the beloved of God. In many ways it has been a ministry of “setting the captives free.”

As we simplify our work by publishing on the Internet instead of in print, we trust that each and every one whose heart has been touched will “take flight” with the Spirit of Love, and seek intimate fellowship with our loving God.

The cover picture and the theme of this magazine, “The Call to Prayer,” are reminders to us all that

life is meant to be a *response* to God. The couple in Millet’s beautiful painting are busily going about their everyday tasks when they hear the distant bells tolling, reminding them to pray. They respond. They stop and bow their heads before God.

We hope that in the future whenever any one of us becomes aware of a similar call from God we will

In the days ahead, we trust that each and every one whose heart has been touched will “take flight” with the Spirit of Love, and seek intimate fellowship with our loving God.

respond in the same way. It may not be the tolling of a bell that calls us to prayer—but it will be a request for a response, nevertheless. So, let’s listen, so that we might hear.

One of my favorite things to do when I am at home in Australia—or even here, out in the countryside—is to watch for eagles in the sky. My “stamping ground” near Melbourne is home to the largest eagle of all,

the golden eagle. To watch these enormous birds, almost motionless in the sky as they sail with the wind currents, is a joy—and such a picture of freedom.

Occasionally, when I’m truly at peace with my world and with my God, I identify with these creatures, as I feel my spirit soar free from my human cares, and take flight with the Spirit of Love, care-free and at one.

Many of you have inspired and encouraged me over the years: by your heartfelt appreciation, your honest sharing of your painful search for reality, or just a line or a word that “says it all” about your relationship with a gracious, loving God. I may sound “upbeat”—and I am, most of the time. But there have been a few down times when the gentle loving voice of God has come to me on the phone, or in a letter from one of you. Thank you, all, for your kindnesses.

As we bid farewell to *Union Life* in print, this is what I wish for each one of us: that we will not regret the past, nor fear the future, but that we will live in the present moment—free in the awareness of our indissoluble union with the Trinity, enjoying the music and the dance of love that only intimacy with Jesus, our Eternal Spouse, brings. □

Editorial cont.

Spirit are one. As faith persons, we do no greater favor to ourselves than to make it a daily practice to turn within in a prayer of silence (contemplative prayer), responding with love to the One who first loved us, beholding His presence, and anticipating the transformation that comes to all as they recognize their oneness with Christ.

As we open ourselves to the Lord daily in solitude and silence, we will *experience* the rivers of His love flow through us to our hurting and expectant world. This is what we were made for—to love and be loved. This is transcendent living. □

P.S. Now for a few personal words. All of my past 23 years as Editor of *Union Life* have been fulfilling beyond imagination. But the last nine years (1990-1998), during which we discovered and emphasized the transforming potential of contemplative prayer, have been the most thrilling and wonderful.

Jan Ord and I (as Executive Editor and Editor) have probably been blessed more by the message we have shared than anyone else. It is hard to believe that it has taken me a lifetime to see that Christ alone is my Lord, my Life and my Love.

I urge you to not just be readers of our words, but daily be silent beholders of the Lord, our Lover.

Conferences & Retreats

For those interested in attending a Conference or Retreat: some of our advertised meetings emphasize teaching on the knowing of our union with Christ; and others specifically focus on the contemplative life—experiential union through the practice of contemplative prayer. Please read the advertisement carefully.

• SPRING 1999 • DALLAS, TX

A Quiet Retreat
(date not yet determined)

with Bill Volkman
& Jan Ord

The focus will be intimacy
with God,
with a lot of time
devoted to the practice
of contemplative prayer
as a group.

For further information
please contact:
Greg Smith
1710 Gateway, #300
Richardson TX 75080
phone (214) 503-6833

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Also, we have a new phone and FAX number. Please make a note of it. It is:

(630) 871-7734

Even though this is the *last* issue of *Union Life* magazine in its print form, we look forward to staying in touch with as many of you as possible through the Internet, and personally.

Your name will stay in our database if we hear from you on a regular basis—at least once a year. That way, if you wish, we will contact you when we plan to be in your area. We will also post planned retreats on our web site.

All correspondence should always be addressed to:

**Union Life
P.O. Box 2877
Glen Ellyn IL 60138**

Remember: the official web site address for *Union Life* is:
<http://www.unionlife.com>



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In the USA or outside,
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Ask a friend who is
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Published by **UNION LIFE**:

Bill Volkman
 The Wink of Faith "Christ-in-you" in layman's language. (1988 edition) 276 p. \$8.00
 HARDBACK \$12.00
 Basking in A call to the prayer of silence. 160 p. \$10.00
 His Presence

Union Life
 Infinite Supply Vol. 1 *Union Life's* 50 best articles: 1976-1980. 286 p. \$7.00
 HARDBACK \$10.00
 Infinite Supply Vol. 2 The best from 1981-1985. 432 p. \$7.00

Other recommended books:

Carlo Carretto
 The God Who Comes God's presence within us. 232 p. \$11.00

Jean-Pierre DeCausade
 Sacrament of the Present Moment An 18th century classic on living in the now. 103 p. \$12.00

James Finley
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Jeanne Guyon
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Recently, Mary Ann Hammersla completed our first "talking book."

We are delighted to offer you, on audio tape

Basking in His Presence
 by Bill Volkman
 read by Mary Ann Hammersla

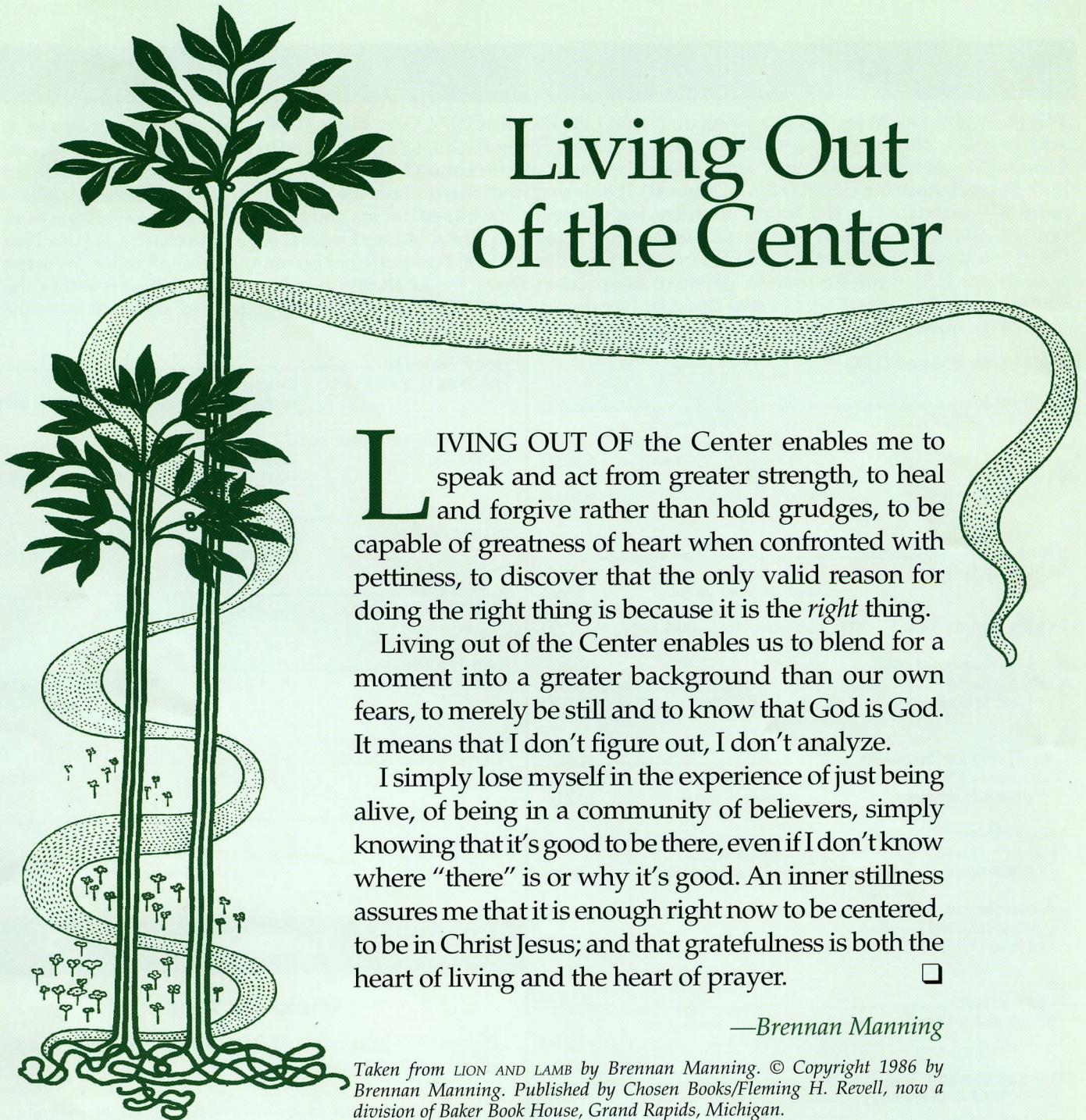
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Living Out of the Center



LIVING OUT OF the Center enables me to speak and act from greater strength, to heal and forgive rather than hold grudges, to be capable of greatness of heart when confronted with pettiness, to discover that the only valid reason for doing the right thing is because it is the *right* thing.

Living out of the Center enables us to blend for a moment into a greater background than our own fears, to merely be still and to know that God is God. It means that I don't figure out, I don't analyze.

I simply lose myself in the experience of just being alive, of being in a community of believers, simply knowing that it's good to be there, even if I don't know where "there" is or why it's good. An inner stillness assures me that it is enough right now to be centered, to be in Christ Jesus; and that gratefulness is both the heart of living and the heart of prayer. □

—Brennan Manning

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