

Wondering Between Two Worlds:
Awakening to the Living God

by Jim Conlon

Planetary People Press
www.becomingplanetarypeople.com

Planetary People Press
A Division of JTT Marketing LLC
562 Winthrop Road
Union, NJ 07083

Copyright ©2018 by Jim Conlon

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any other means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of Planetary People Publishing.

Please direct permissions requests to:
john@jttmarketing.com.

Printed in the United States of America

Conlon, Jim, 1936—
Wondering Between Two Worlds: Awakening to the Living
God

Print ISBN: 978-0-692-08364-2

Praise for *Wondering Between Two Worlds*

Jim Conlon's closely interwoven poetry and prose awaken the reader to the beauty and wonders of Earth and cosmos, to the miracle of life and of being alive. His stories, memories, and reflections draw the reader toward the divine, through the mysteries and beauty of creation, to what Teilhard de Chardin so powerfully described as the "divine milieu," a milieu that reveals itself to eyes of love and hearts of fire.

—**Ursula King**, Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Bristol, England

Father Jim Conlon is a man dedicated to all people of the world, all creatures and all things. This book of short essays and poems is inspirational. I feel uplifted by it. It has straightened out my vision here and there, something I need every day. He writes as a Catholic priest with a wide-open mind. If you can look through that window with him, wherever you stand, you will see the world with fresh eyes.

—**Thomas Moore**, author of *Care of the Soul* and *Ageless Soul*

Ecopoetry provides the creative horizon for this collection of poems and inspiring words. The reader is invited to embrace a new synthesis transcending our inherited dualisms, so that we can rediscover the creative God at the heart of creation itself. A timely and inspiring resource from one who has devoted his entire life to the vision and inspiration of the new story.

—**Diarmuid O'Murchu**, author of *Incarnation: A New Evolutionary Threshold*

Jim Conlon has given us many books of prose. Now he turns to reflections through poetry. He shines forth with a vision of the great beauty and mystery in nature. At the same time, he shows his generous capacity to be attentive to human suffering. This mingling of beauty and compassion is arresting—something we need to cultivate in our times. This book provides such a path.

—**Mary Evelyn Tucker**, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Jim Conlon's spirituality, as expressed in the poetry of *Wondering Between Two Worlds*, carries a reader into a glorious time, what Thomas Berry called the ecozoic era. Jim feels the divine presence in all the things of the universe and allows himself to be swept up in wonder. If you read these poems, you too will find yourself praying with Jim, both as you read and as you go forth through your days, surrounded by magnificence.

—**Brian Swimme**, co-author with Thomas Berry of *The Universe Story*

Seldom do you find so much beauty, hope, and wisdom all in one place! This is the wonderful fruit of Jim Conlon's full life of growing and changing—and passing on that growing and changing to so many of the rest of us. We—and creation itself—are all the grateful beneficiaries.

—**Richard Rohr, O.F.M.**, Center for Action and Contemplation, Albuquerque, New Mexico

~TABLE OF CONTENTS~

<u>Introduction</u>	9
<u>Prayer</u>	19
<u>Stories</u>	45
<u>Creativity</u>	77
<u>Nature</u>	103
<u>Beauty</u>	119
<u>Mystery</u>	135
<u>Hope</u>	147
<u>Mercy</u>	169
<u>Gratitude</u>	181
<u>Presence</u>	203
<u>Engagment</u>	221
<u>Geo-Justice</u>	239
<u>About the Author</u>	265

~DEDICATION~

To Trina McCormick and Theresa Linehan and the staff of Springbank.

These women bring beauty to the world through clay, color, and word. They befriend the Earth and accomplish their great work by beautifying Springbank Retreat for Ecology and the Arts, where they welcome sacred seekers from around the world who journey there for rest and prayer and to reimagine the future.

~INTRODUCTION~

A Pilgrim's Prayer

Creator God,
source of love and life,
be with us now
as we venture forth.

May all our days be flooded
with precious gifts
and great anticipation,
enveloped with fresh energy.

May we discover
new doorways,
opening to the unfinished journey
that awaits us.

A Pilgrim Wandering Between Two Worlds

We are pilgrims of the future, grounded in anticipation of a world that will be ever-unfinished. This vantage point on the universe invites us to become people of beauty, people who embrace an exquisite balance between novelty and continuity. We are challenged to experience the depths, magnitude, and magnificence of existence, to become more and more alive to the potential before us.

The way ahead will be prompted by a fresh awareness that there is still much for us to do, and that we live at a time filled with opportunities to become a people of the future. As people on this journey of abundance, we dive deeply to explore the ocean of grace we dare to call our life.

We awaken to each new moment and become aware that our world is not static or stuck; rather, it is a swirling upstart spring that is expansive, invigorating, curious, and open to what is next. On this journey, we venture forth toward an integral life founded on two faiths: faith in God and faith in Earth. With this view, we focus on what lasts, and we delve into the inexhaustible depths of what we call God.

We take up the challenge as people of two faiths to reconcile and synthesize the religious zeal of our Christian tradition with the emergence of the new cosmic story. It is a story that invites the practice of a profound cosmic patience and anticipation, as each new chapter in the story unfolds.

The pilgrim's journey, as she wanders between two worlds, moves forward in reconciling our trust in God and Earth

so that it becomes trust in God in and through Earth. This trust is woven together in a tapestry that is religiously forward looking, yet unfinished and sensitive as we navigate the world through shared images, stories, and symbolic languages.

We peer attentively into the silent depths of a vast well of wisdom, wherein all things feel soaked in the sacred. We realize anew that our experience is derived from an immersion in the great new story.

With Canadian Chief Dan George, we become aware that “We are alive as much as we keep the Earth alive.” This aliveness is overflowing with insight, breath, zest, reverence, awe, wonder, liberation, love, and the fullness of life.

With St. Augustine, we cry out with hope, which is the mother of anger and courage. This time in history can be understood as an apostatic time, when at first glance we seem to be embarking on a journey into nothingness, a time when there do not appear to be any answers to our enduring questions. Words fail us as we ascend to a place where life is once again magnificent.

A new time of eco-poetics is rising on the horizon. Seekers from many regions and backgrounds and with many perspectives are putting the promptings of their hearts into words. Their words flow from the deep ecological imprint in their souls into images and stories that connect art, politics, and Earth. Their poetry penetrates the psyche and heart to transform us and give birth to a new world that is fresh, unfinished, and entirely new.

A new era is upon us, calling forth each of us to ponder the intersection of sacred trust and the amazing universe. As we wander between two worlds, it is time to offer our eco-poetic response.

We Remember and Give Thanks

We remember and give thanks:

For the gift of unique differences present in God's creation—every color, culture, gender and creed; every flower, tree and creature who manifests the beauty of difference and dissolves all tendencies to make the world the same.

We remember and give thanks:

For being born into an interconnected world where relationships are the very essence of existence, and for the opportunity to create community and heal all brokenness, should it become manifest in families, communities, politics and culture.

We remember and give thanks:

For the capacity for intimacy and sensitivity that we gratefully express in our relationships with self, neighbors, Earth and the divine.

We remember and give thanks:

For the capacity and possibility to bring more beauty to the world, especially where it is most needed regarding Earth, society and soul.

We remember and give thanks:

For the gift of openness that offers new possibilities as they shine forth in unplanned surprises that show up on our paths not yet taken.

We remember and give thanks:

For the opportunity to lend our gifts to support the ongoing, unfolding dynamics of the great work of our time, as available to us through the gifts of culture, society and soul.

We remember and give thanks:

For solitude and engagement that make it possible to be attentive to the sacred impulses that emerge into fresh awareness and prompt us into action.

We remember and give thanks:

For the gift of creativity, those resurrection moments occur when dreams rise up in our imagination and take residence beyond conscious thought. May these guiding stars continue to reveal the call within the call, as we become liberated from patterns of the past and venture forth beyond trodden paths and give our gifts to the world in as-yet-unimagined ways.

We remember and give thanks:

That when we do good works, we are aligning our gifts to the dream of the Earth.

We remember and give thanks:

That the work we are called to do is not good because it will turn out well, but rather because it is worth doing.

We remember and give thanks:

For the challenges that each day presents when we embrace patience, ambiguity and risk, knowing that somehow we are on the path of gratitude and praise.

We remember and give thanks

That our greatest gift in what we are called to do in this life is to make our contribution to what remains un-lived and unfinished on our journey.

We remember and give thanks:

As we reflect on our journey and ponder the origins of the universe, and its unique unfolding in time, and gain a glimpse of the future still unfinished before us.

~PRAYER~

Prayer Is a Noun

Prayer is a noun. To pray is a verb.

Prayer happens when we gaze, bathe, soak, listen.

When we pray, we become enveloped in the divine presence.

To pray can be understood as engaging to be freed from an unlived life.

To pray is to notice, pay attention, tell our story and the story of the universe.

To pray is to be grateful, embrace mystery, become unself-conscious.

To pray is to encounter, imagine, experience beauty.

To pray is to embrace solitude, to wonder.

Prayer happens as we engage in justice, dialogue, become one with an experience of beauty.

Pray, dream, live the question, have an emotional moment.

In prayer, become curious, become a prophet, a mystic, experience a spark of grace, see God in all things.

Prayer Happens

Thomas Merton encourages us to pray; however, he does not tell us how.

Others offer more clues. Mary Oliver says, “I don’t know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention.” These words remind us that prayer comes from noticing what is all around us.

Meister Eckhart says prayer is about gratitude: “If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”

When we pray with intention, we are empowered to accomplish the things for which we pray. Prayer happens when we ponder a passage from scripture; gaze upon the beauty of creation; or experience the enveloping presence of the divine as fully present in every plant, flower and tree.

Meister Eckhart speaks again: “If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon, so full of God is every creature.”

Portuguese poet Sophia de Mello-Breyner Andresen names the deep mystery of prayer when she writes, “I’m listening, but I don’t know if what I hear is silence or God.”

For many, our formative years were framed by a formal approach to prayer. Perhaps today your prayer has evolved and you have a more felt sense of the sacred.

We can say that because justice is constitutive of the gospel,

justice-making is itself a prayer. Justice can be understood as a moment of grace in which the walls between the secular and the sacred dissolve, and we enter a new experience in which everything is holy.

Prayer happens when we listen to the cry of the poor and say, “I saw Christ today,” or when we experience the cry of the Earth as we witness climate change in floods, fires, hurricanes and drought.

Prayer happens when we imagine ourselves being carried forward by a profound awareness of God in all things and all things in God.

Black Mountain Prayer

Fourteen in number, we sit in a circle,
wise women whose cultures are many.

On the journey of rest and letting go,
we hail from Nigeria, Peru, New Zealand,
Australia, America, Canada, Micronesia.

Hearing the stories of the people of Abraham,
we think, *Je me souviens*,
Recuerde, I remember.

In our circle of resurgent spirits,
the freedom songs of Exodus
echo in our souls.

Here in Maggie Valley,
whispered songs of letting go
invite the gaze of Jesus.

In this Black Mountain moment,
we open our hearts once again
in our quest for the living God.

Prayer to the Ancient One

Ancient One of ancient days,
creator of water, rock, fire and air,
mother of winged, finned, furred and legged,
sister of all who walk, swim and soar,
we thank you for the gifts of love and life.

Great Spirit, we raise our immolation to you on high,
and to every good companion down below.
On this October day,
we send our prayers to the sacred sky
and embrace all children here below.

Life of Prayer

Our approach to prayer reveals the in-between times we live in and reflects double-sided points of view. This was demonstrated by a friend who contributed the following comment in a conversation about prayer: “When I wake, I feel grateful; then I ask for stuff.”

My early years, particularly my first years in the seminary, were days of inordinate self-consciousness. I understood prayer to be a time to scour the psyche and examine every thought and impulse that surfaced from the depths of the soul.

Over the years, I set aside the practices from those early days, which for the most part involved repetitive prayer. Now my prayer is more about the experience of awe and wonder that comes from looking around and drinking in the beauty and entrancement of the natural world, the spontaneity of a child or a rose about to blossom.

Now when I pray, I reflect on the profound insights of the mystics and prophets of yesterday and today. One of these is Thomas Merton, who summarizes the spiritual call of the true self to be transparent at the threshold of each encounter with the divine.

Over the years, my prayer life has changed. It has evolved from the family rosary to a later breviary, to a current immersion into the sea of the sacred, wherein words are replaced by an awareness of the divine beauty that surrounds and permeates all of life.

A Cosmologist's Prayer

I want to live like Earth lives,
dispensing bouquets of beauty all around,
to be alive, visionary and prophetic,
immersed in the wonder
and belonging of each new day.

May I be one who prays,
a therapist of the apathetic,
a vagabond of the obvious,
someone who delivers
each person to herself.

May I be a grateful person,
guided by story
and shared dream experience,
a cosmological subject,
an architect and practitioner
of those great cosmic gifts
of Earth, art and spirit.

May I be one who celebrates
the generosity of the sun,
the wisdom of each revelatory moment,
as paradox becomes
the instrument of truth and surprise.

May I be a good companion,
a source of creativity and compassion
for all who join us on the journey.

Now is the time, dear friends,
become a beacon of hope,
a source of fresh energy
and zest for life,
an author of what lies
deep in each tender soul.

May I be one who proclaims
the habits of my heart
through the practices
of clay, color, music and word,
and who makes the road itself
by walking through the cosmic gifts
and virtues of patience, ambiguity and risk.

May I become a cosmological person
who ventures forth
and discovers new ways of feeling,
and whose heart
discovers new ways of thinking.

As we become aware
that tomorrow will unfold
from the far reaches of the universe
into a new cultural genesis,
together we pray:
“May all beings be happy, may all beings be free.”

Aho! Mitakuye oyaſin.
Merci.
Deo gracias.
Gracias a Dios.

Blessed be.

Yes, blessed be.

Amen, Alleluia, Amen!

This is My Blood

Now, quenched and nourished by this great and generous moment, we venture forth to heal what is broken and renew the face of the Earth.

Together, we join our hands and hearts to make possible new and heroic acts that flow from mercy, justice and love.

We join our hands and hearts today and give thanks to the Ancient One of ancient days.

Nourished by food for the journey, we celebrate each new moment with signs of companionship and gestures of peace.

We honor the presence of the triune God.

We co-create the future, replete with harmony, balance and peace, as together we celebrate and say to the Earth and each other, "May the future be better than all the pasts."

Amen!

Rosary for the New Story

Prayer is joy, emptiness, wonder, imagination.
Prayer heals the soul with acts of justice.
Prayer is following the guidance of Rilke,
who tells us to love the questions themselves.

Prayer is joy, sorrow, creativity, change.
Prayer is pottery, painting, drumming, taiji.
Prayer is the openness to be like Teilhard,
a pilgrim of the future who is returning from the past.

Prayer is an act of the true self.
Prayer is the new story rising into action.

See More Clearly

My prayer is, as the song says,
“Love thee more dearly,
see thee more clearly,
day by day.”

I pray amidst the sunshine and rain,
the solitude and pain,
to stop the bullets of violence
that pierce our hearts,
wound our minds,
cause upset in our souls.

Today is the time, dear friend.
Be like an astronaut
who views the world on high,
views the world as one,
no boundaries, no separation,
one body, one spirit,
one Earth, one home,
one place from which
to grow your soul.

Before Tomorrow Comes

Listen now
to the voice of the hidden one,
that one over there
in the back row,
over there, almost unseen.

Listen now again
and invite her to the front row.
Together let us sing and praise
before tomorrow comes.

Let Heaven

Come, wise and ineffable One,
embrace Your people.
Deep in the heart
of all You hold dear,
flower forth.
Petal me with goodness,
beauty and love.
Disclose what remains hidden.
Send forth Your spirit
to heal the wounds of Earth.
Heal the brokenhearted.
Make us one again,
holy without blemish.
Become the novelty
from which beauty flows,
with patterns that connect.
Let heaven happen now.

A Good Day

Walking by
on a crisp late December day,
I see wheelchairs, pushcarts.

Shuffling elders greet the day.
Will it be their last New Year?
I wonder.

I stop to review
the headlines in today's paper.

Along the way,
I enter a chapel
from the back street.

I gaze on Jesus
and wish our tattered world,
with confidence, Good day!

Teach Me

God of hope, mercy and peace,
Sacred One of sacred days,
unite what is broken,
renew the face of creation.

Teach me to live.
Teach me to give.

Sacred One of sacred days,
teach me about beauty,
about difference, about love.

Sacred One of sacred days,
awaken me to understand,
experience and embrace
God in all things.

Teach me,
that we may become people of hope,
people of mercy, people of peace.
Amen.

What It Means to Live

A cool, fresh morning
in South Carolina.
I pray today for freedom
from whatever blocks my spirit
or incarcerates my soul.

I pray for the freedom
to roam the far-off land,
to walk softly
in the sunshine and the rain.

Cleanse my heart, O Sacred One.
Illuminate my soul.

As I awaken today,
may I imagine once again
the meaning of my life,
know on this cool Carolina morning
what it means to live.

Max Comes Home

Springbank Retreat is a sacred place where women from around the world gather to renew their spirit, refresh their energy and reflect on the beauty of creation as they drink in the divine creativity that infuses their souls and all of life.

Among the Springbank community are a number of four-legged friends that Thomas Merton referred to as *saints*. One member of this canine community is a shy, beautiful creature called Max.

On occasion, Max likes to wander off the property. Once while I was staying at Springbank, Max disappeared on Easter Sunday. He did not return the next day. When he still had not appeared after several days, we began to wonder if some harm had befallen Max. We feared it was possible that he would never return.

On the Wednesday after that Easter, several of us were working on the community's prayer lodge. At the end of the day, I suggested we pray for Max and send out our energy for his safe return.

There were five of us. We joined hands and formed a circle, and began to pray. As energy flowed from hand to body to hand, we imagined a cone of energy surrounding us and extending to Max, wherever he might be. Our prayer was to cleanse, purify and protect him. We imagined the energy surrounding Max and inviting him home.

One member of our group said she could sense Max. She

assured us that he was alive. We concluded our prayer circle and went off into the night.

The next morning, we received good news: Max had come home and was enjoying an abundant breakfast. It seemed that our prayer had been answered. Our prayer for Max had invited him home.

A Great Amen

Now is the time
to claim my inheritance,
say how proud I am
to have lived in Canada.

I went to school there,
skipped grade three,
road the school bus,
attended high school.

I worked the streets
in Toronto and Chicago,
taught theology,
worked for justice.

I let go of pain,
went south to pray,
to celebrate each moment,
to say amen today.

God of the Cosmos

God of the cosmos,
blessed of the land,
I come before You today
to listen,
to celebrate,
to pray.

God of the cosmos,
blessed of the land,
we are welcome here.
Beauty heals our hearts
on this wondrous day.

Sisters, brothers, friends,
may each soul expand,
embrace the mystery of it all,
gaze upon the goodness of each day.

Mass for the Earth

Great and holy Mystery, we gather here today, with trust in our hearts, in this sacred place, at this altar of the Earth, where longing and terror lie.

Here in this world of beauty, we wonder and give thanks for the gift of Your creation.

We welcome all gathered at this moment. We bring hope and peace and promise to all and to every nation.

Today, at this incarnational moment, we tell the great story. We remember our origins and how all came about.

We come to You today, along with our ancestral companions, those good and gracious ones of yesterday who join us now and who make the two worlds one.

We announce the great narrative of our evolutionary lives.

We remember those early days when we emerged from the vast oceanic depths and blossomed forth into the unimaginable beauty that adorns this radiant planet.

This sacred rock where our altar stands today was formed from the elements. Wondrous beauty from the divine imagination formed mountains, flowers and creatures great and small.

We take these simple elements of bread and wine, conscious of this liberating moment of yesterday and today.

We take this bread as freedom for the land and as fuel for the journey, as together we say, "This is my body."

As we take this chalice of wine from the work of human hands, we dare to say, "This my blood."

