

# Refresh

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. Below the sky, a range of dark mountains stretches across the horizon. In the foreground, a calm body of water reflects the colors of the sunset. On the right side, the dark silhouette of a tree is visible, partially obscuring the view.

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The heart of  
contemplative  
spirituality



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Spiritual Growth Ministries (SGM) is a network of people from diverse denominations who seek to nurture the health and foster the growth of contemplative Christian spirituality in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Our primary expressions of this are through spiritual direction, formation of spiritual directors, contemplative resources like *Refresh*, and retreats. We value contemplative prayer and practices as a precious taonga; a treasure at the heart of our faith. We invite you to experience the refreshing stream of the contemplative lineage, flowing right here, right now, in Aotearoa.

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### SGM Contacts

Website: [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

#### Administrator:

Jenna Edgar, PO Box 363, New Plymouth 4340; 027 311 3137,  
admin@sgm.org.nz

#### Workgroup Convenor [Board Chair]:

Bruce Maden Bruce.maden@infogen.net.nz

#### Spiritual Directors Formation Programme Coordinator:

Fran Francis, 14 Oruamo Place, Beach Haven, Auckland 0626; 09 4191152  
fran.francis@sgm.org.nz

#### Desktop Publishing and Printing:

Advocate Print, Rotorua

#### Kaitiaki of Communications:

Kathryn Overall-Cass, 41 Hampton Terrace, Parkvale, Tauranga 3110; 0212527595  
kathryn@sgm.org.nz

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'God breathes through us so completely, so gently,  
we hardly feel it.  
Yet it is our everything.  
Thank you God.'

*John Coltrane*



## Deep calling to deep Jesus and the Contemplative Invitations of the Heart by Paul Fromont

*Do not despise your inner world.<sup>1</sup>*

*The first step towards Love, the middle and the last, are non-verbal.<sup>2</sup>*

*Here is my secret. It's quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart.  
Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.<sup>3</sup>*



© Paul Fromont

Early in 2023, I read a newly published book on Centering Prayer written for a general but interested readership – Caroline Oakes' *Practice the Pause: Jesus' Contemplative Practice, New Brain Science, and What it Means to be Fully Human*.

What I especially valued was her affirming my longstanding belief that Jesus **was** fully human<sup>4</sup> and therefore like us, needing to give himself over to what Oakes describes as 'the transformational process of facing the very real psychological challenges we face as human beings – the fears, hurts, and unconscious motivations...'

Jesus had to *learn* to live into the potential of what it means to be fully human and to grow into his divine nature (*theosis*).

I take Jesus' divinity seriously and actively seek to engage his humanity through the Jesus stories in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; prayerfully discerning in them Jesus' invitations to me to become more like him, more whole, freer, more alive, and indeed, more fully human; both for my own sake and especially for those important others in my life.

It's this link between Jesus and contemplation that's become increasingly important to me – integrating every dimension of my life – and across time slowly changing my inner disposition in ways that feel freeing and lifegiving.

*I felt I was living at a distance from myself, at a distance from others, and at an even greater distance from God.*

My first published reflection appeared in the Winter 2006 edition of *Refresh*. It was written at a time when I'd come to a juncture in my life. Or, as I would often say, I felt I was living at a distance from myself, at a distance from others, and at an even greater distance from God.<sup>5</sup>

At that time, I'd been reading a book written by two Jesuit priests, *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies*. A quote from this book set the scene for my 2006 reflection. It still resonates as I write this latest one: 'Each of us, without exception, is trapped in encompassing forms of destruction that distort human freedom and seek to frustrate the human desire to love, to be creative, and to create community.'

In 2006, I felt very lonely and unhappy, and realised I'd made poor life choices and mistakes as a consequence. I don't think I even understood what it might have meant for me to be happy.

As a male, I'd grown to that point believing I needed to be self-contained, self-enclosed, and self-sufficient. I believed I had to minimise my needs, and my feelings had to be pushed down and not faced. Sadly, my most familiar emotion was anger, and I had no idea what swirled around beneath it.

Without forethought or deliberation on my part, I'd separated myself from an intentional engagement with my inner world, and from what Martha Nussbaum describes as the 'articulate mastery of [my] own emotional experiences.'

Fast forward seventeen years to this stage in my journey. At long last I now know – the more deeply I experience God, the more deeply I experience my own identity.<sup>6</sup> Today I'm more comfortable, more engaged with the inner dimensions of who I am, and with my feelings and emotions.

Ignatius of Loyola, often referred to as a 'contemplative in action', understood the importance of a 'felt knowledge of Jesus Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Ignatius took seriously all his emotions and feelings – whether consoling or not. He didn't push them down or ignore them but used them to discern and deepen his everyday experience of God and God's will for his life – and how to live more wholly and well.

Ignatius instinctively knew both emotion and intellect influence the will.<sup>8</sup> Most crucially he believed, 'the *experience* of Jesus Christ takes a person into the deepest depths of the inner-trinitarian life' – that Jesus is primary in God's intention to love. Ignatius understood – through experience of Christ – his human nature was being transfigured by what Rowan Williams describes as 'the presence of divine energy saturating yet not destroying it'.<sup>9</sup>

Important too, as David Benner observes, 'what is discovered in [our] experience of God is not so much knowledge – as love.' God, he tells us, is found to be incomprehensible to our intellect but not to our love. Love becomes the only subversion for those who have a strong instinctive tendency to be more in their heads<sup>10</sup>, than in their hearts or bodies.

Today more than ever, it feels *more* needful and lifegiving to give myself to the ongoing work of contemplation, and inner transformation – to what Thomas Keating would describe as God's 'divine therapy'.

In Centering Prayer, I consent to allow myself to be drawn into the restorative and transformative experiences of silence and stillness. To be carried 'out beyond the boundaries of ego'<sup>11</sup>, and into what Sarah Bachelard describes as, 'the infinite otherness of God'. Into the dual invitations of 'self-emptying love' (*kenosis*), and of surrendering control.

Today, I open interior and psychological space as I walk in the overwhelming beauty of the Tutukākā coast. I'm deeply grateful for the privilege of living here, and often find myself reflecting on Jesus' parable of the man who finds treasure hidden in a field and sells everything in order to buy the field (Matthew 13:44).<sup>12</sup>

On the edge of land and sea, I'm able to be alone in a wordless and direct way – the conceptual level of my mind can't manufacture.<sup>13</sup> I silently open myself to the rhythms of the ocean - its rise and fall, its waves and the ways they roll onto the coast. I listen, I look to the horizon, contemplate the sky, the clouds, the sun, the seasons, nature all around me, light and shadow, and I feel the presence of the numinous and the Divine.

In these coastal places, I feel held, loved as I am, and at peace – quietly grateful for my many cracks and imperfections, all of which allow the light to get in.<sup>14</sup>

Contemplation changes how I see, feel, touch, and relate to life. Today I engage with life differently. Slowly I learn to live from what Thomas Merton calls the centre of my being, a point of nothingness untouched by sin, ego, and illusion – a point of pure truth. A point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at my disposal, and is inaccessible to the fantasies of my own mind or the brutalities of my own will. 'This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in me, *le point vierge*.'<sup>15</sup>

As I reread my 2006 reflection, as I reflect on my journey and the importance to it of contemplation, I see who I am, and I think back to who I was. That younger man wasn't perfect. He still isn't, but he was brave despite his anxieties and fears. He was a wayfinder. He started out across his personal 'abyss'.<sup>16</sup> He took risks, he picked himself up when he fell down. He's come a long way as God has loved him more and more into life.

Contemplative practice is now vital to me and how I live. It's profoundly relational, receptive, and self-giving. It takes seriously the reality of Christ in me<sup>17</sup> drawing me ever more fully into the invitation of Jesus's life and continuing mission in response to 'the needs and possibilities of the world'<sup>18</sup> and at the same time breaking down the myriad conscious and unconscious ways I resist God's love for me – as I learn to trust God to do what only God can do and needs to do in and through my life.<sup>19</sup>

1 Martha Nussbaum, in *Take My Advice: Letters to the Next Generation* edited by James L. Harmon.

2 Yahia Lababidi, *Quarantine Notes: Aphorisms on Morality and Mortality*, p.18.

3 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*.

4 Often, it's easy to forget this, and relate only to his divinity. For more on these themes I recommend Jesuit Priest Joseph A. Tetlow's *Considering Jesus: The Human Experience of the Redeemer* (2023).

5 In part, this included the need to challenge my received images, understanding, and experiences of God. I needed to redefine my relationship to the Catholicism of my upbringing.

6 Harvey D. Egan makes this point in his book *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, p.47. John Calvin, from a Protestant perspective, voiced a similar belief in his Institutes.

7 Harvey D. Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic*.

8 Harvey D. Egan, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon*, pp. 71-72.

- 9 Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things*.
- 10 Like me, an enneagram type 5 with a 4 wing.
- 11 My favourite image to meditate on this theme is Leunig's drawing of 'The Garden Gate.'
- 12 I think of Mary Oliver's poem, 'Mindful'.
- 13 Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, p.26.
- 14 Leonard Cohen song, *Anthem*.
- 15 Thomas Merton, adapted from his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.
- 16 Drawing on a Thomas Merton quote taken from *The Wisdom of the Desert* (1970), p. 11, and included in my 2006 reflection. 'What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the *abyss* that separates us from our ourselves...'
- 17 Colossians 1:27 (MSG).
- 18 Sarah Bachelard, *Contemplative Christianity for Our Time* (2021).
- 19 See Thomas Keating's little book, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (1999). See also Basil Pennington's essay 'The Formation of the False Self and Coming into the True Self', in *Contemplation in Action* by Richard Rohr.

## Labyrinth

by Abi Travathan

Brushing up against the edges  
of an unseen path.  
I forget  
to look up sometimes  
so caught up in one step  
after another.  
Almost missing the flight of  
the piwakawaka.  
A comforting presence,  
this spiritual guide.  
Focus on this moment  
not the getting to,  
but the being and becoming  
circling around and back  
finding the unexpected moment  
of grace and You  
who was and is  
never tame  
even in the song sung  
in the moment of creation.  
Step into,  
onto,  
around,  
until...  
I find the center is  
not a destination after all.  
But the place where You are  
and I am  
meeting for the first time again.  
Reconciled and reunited,  
we begin again.





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## Arc of life in the Presence The heart of contemplative spirituality

by Andrew Dunn

What is contemplation? The Latin roots get it simply and clearly: *Com* – with. *Templum* – the meeting place with the gods.

In Christian spirituality, 'contemplation' is simply a meeting time with God – with Father, Son or Holy Spirit, with our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, with our Creator, with our divine lover.

### Experience of Presence

Looking back over eight decades, contemplative spirituality has been a regular feature of my life. My earliest experience of being in relationship with something or someone in the expansiveness of creation – was when I was five years old. My father took me to the lime works he owned with his brother Albert at Waimumu, a few miles west of Gore. While they worked, I wandered over the neighbouring farmland – enjoying the rolling tussock ridges, the bird life and the warmth of the sun.

Suddenly, I caught a sense of the largeness of everything. This sense wrapped around me as part of the warmth of the sun, the expansiveness of hills, the gently waving tussocks, and the silence of it all. It felt like I was being wrapped up in it all – being met in a way I hadn't seen or felt before. It wasn't until much later I learned the Hebrew word for the Lord is YHWH, Yahweh – which means 'The One Who Is'. It had been the Is-ness of God that warmed my heart – and continues to do so!

Future family camping holidays fed this sense of spaciousness I found so nourishing. Indeed, to this day, all my outdoor activities nurture that sense of presence. It's one reason I have an annual pass to Auckland Zoo where I created a photo montage for our Congregation's annual art show.

I had another profound experience when I was seven or eight. Scripture Union held a one week after-school programme based on John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* at our church in Gore. The story of Pilgrim's journey was screened in black and white, and spread over five sessions. I was really caught up in the unfolding story, and on the afternoon Pilgrim and his companion stumbled on Jesus on the Cross on a hillside 'gently ascending', I had another deeply intimate experience of being met – this time by Jesus on the cross.

*I had another deeply intimate experience of being met again – this time by Jesus on the cross.*

That afternoon a burden rolled off my back – my heart and mind disappeared into a deep hole on the hillside. Looking back, that afternoon's experience was the beginning

of my understanding of the power of the atonement, and of some differentiation for me of the personhood of God.

That afternoon I became a disciple of Jesus in a deeper way than before.

Another experience of the intimacy of God's loving happened when I was 17 – it was deeply formative and lives today – but isn't for sharing. It taught me many things, not least, that talking about my experiences can empty them of their richness and depth. Some things are best treasured and nurtured rather than spilled and shallowed up!

And I found this to be true offering spiritual direction – it's better to encourage each person to develop an awareness of their own experiences, rather than share my own ways of being contemplative.

The ways God blesses us with signs of grace are so varied, there's no 'one way' to live the contemplative life. This suggests to me – it's unwise to try to emulate any contemplative writers' experiences as definitive. I enjoy their books and use them to stimulate my own growth – but not to do it their way.

### **Working with dreams**

My father was in the NZ Army during the Second World War, when I first recall a powerful dream. It recurred for some years. A fighter plane crashed into the corner of our house in Gore, hitting my bedroom and bursting into flames. The dream was vivid and always woke me up as it faded – and there I was – still safe and sound in my cosy bed.

Dad came home safely from the war, but memory of the dream remained vivid for years. Since then, dreams have been a lively part of my sleep experience and are seldom negative. One of my 'dream questions' directing others, works well for me too – *What signs of grace have you seen in your dream?*

### **Reflecting on death**

Early in my life the deaths of older relatives were a fact of life. I was rarely impacted personally until my teenage years, when my mother, Edith, succumbed to rampant breast cancer and stunned us all. I never worked well with it till later.

For my own family, four of our five children arrived safely. But at Kapuna Hospital in Papua New Guinea's Gulf Province – despite the skills of our doctors – prematurely born Robert Andrew Dunn died within a few hours of birth. Burying my own son with the help of local pastor and our doctor, Peter Calvert, was demanding – and so painful I couldn't finish the little service!

The greatest consolation for me was making a concrete headstone to mark his grave. And the most immediate 'blessing' was Papuan locals could see we were grieving deeply – a consolation for them we weren't living above the pains of reality they knew so well.

And of course, Margaret's sudden death in 2017 jolted me in unexpected ways – with a deep darkness and little consolation till weeks later. What developed then amazed and nourished me – a deep sense of our union in marriage and in Christ. I still wear our wedding ring to symbolise these.

### **Dealing with reality**

One of my key learnings is contemplative spirituality and contemplative practise aren't escapes from reality – instead, they take me deeper into what is real and what is true.

And it's not about finding a way out of the pains and challenges of life – rather contemplative spirituality engages us with the depth of living, believing, and everything life can throw at us. What emerges is a greater sense of reality, rather than escape from it!

Look at Paul the apostle. His journey of faith is an engagement with the real things of life. Embracing the life Christ lives out in him – in all the joys and pains involved in that reality. His *union with Christ's* teaching must be one of his greatest experiences – and one of his strongest theological contributions to the growing church – then and now. See Galatians 2:19-20: *'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.'*

Everything here has implications for the whole of life in the present day.

### **Contemplative spirituality in action**

I'm quite naturally a member of *Forest and Bird*. Two thirds of the bush at our Oasis retreat centre in Albany Heights are covenanted with *Queen Elizabeth II Trust* – helping form the bush corridor for birds across Auckland from Piha and Muriwai in the west to Whangaparoa and Tiritiri Island sanctuary in the east.

Our service to the Pacific continues financially in contributions to eye surgery across the Islands and numerous serving organisations.

All this seems to me a deep-rooted response – to the daily palpable LOVE of the universe. Nothing in life is outside this loving embrace.

*It's not about finding a way out of the pains and challenges of life – rather contemplative spirituality engages us with the depth of living, believing, and all that life can throw at us.*

## Falling into Love: a journey to the ground of my being

by Katrina Tulip

Standing in a forest I gaze around  
Senses engaged  
Soul receiving  
Dappled light, translucent leaves  
Ancient trees, a trickling stream  
Friendly robins, a gentle breeze  
Everything is connected  
Everything belongs.

Leaving the forest  
I enter a rocky wilderness  
Confronted by huge boulders  
Shaped by powerful forces  
I pick my way through them  
One step at a time  
Not knowing what lies beyond  
Grateful for well-placed handholds  
And the occasional oasis.

I come to a hidden chasm  
I sit by the edge looking in  
It is dark and quiet  
And I cannot see the bottom  
In a dream I see my soul descending  
And hear a gentle whisper, 'Come'  
I strip off my clothes, take a breath,  
And, abandoning myself to God, I leap!

Down, down I fall  
Into the seemingly black void  
The circle of daylight above  
Recedes, then disappears.  
My vision gradually adjusts  
To the darkness surrounding me.  
The chasm expands into a large cavern  
Glow-worms shine  
Twinkling like a myriad of stars

Glimpses of weird and wonderful rock sculptures  
Hanging chandeliers, limestone pillars  
Astonished  
I continue descending.

Below me is a dark still pool  
I slip into it  
barely rippling the surface  
Floating in a warm watery womb  
I hear the heartbeat of Mother God  
Soothed by its rhythm, I pause  
to rest my head against her breast  
My soul bathes  
In her soft murmurings of delight  
Cradled in a Loving Lullaby.

Relaxed and quiet  
I continue my descent  
Into darkness dazzling  
Sparkling and shimmering  
with Mysterious Presence  
An invitation – is it playful?  
'Come, my Beloved, come!'  
My body awakens and responds  
Realization dawns, and I laugh  
I am being wooed by Lover God!

I sink to the bottom of the pool  
My feet gently touch the sand  
And I rest on the ground of my being  
In the deepest part of my soul  
Where it is spacious, silent and still  
I become aware of Someone  
Standing before me  
Gazing at me lovingly  
Arms opened wide in welcome  
Breathing 'yes' with all my being  
I'm enfolded and embraced  
Held tenderly and protectively  
Lost in Love  
Found in Love  
I feel safe  
I am Home.



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## Behold The Heart of Contemplation

By John Franklin

As I think of the heart of contemplation, the word that comes to mind is 'Behold' a word that's dropped out of common usage – but not quite extinct.

We can still read it. It's in the Bible about 1,500 times in the old KJV, 54 in the NRSV, and once in the NIV. Most modern translations use words like, 'look', or 'see'. But to 'behold' is different from just looking and seeing – a much stronger word inviting us to stop, pause, pay attention, notice – there's something important here.

To stop, to be still, to have every intention of being present in the present with the Holy Presence, is to be open to pay attention, to behold. At the heart of our contemplation is the prompting, the invitation, to behold the presence of God – just as Jesus is beholding us whether we're aware or not.

How many times does scripture assure us God is with us? How often does it call us to wait on God where we can experience the loving gaze of Jesus?

God, the artist, provides the most incredibly colourful sunsets that summon us to 'behold'. The invitation is to be there and contemplate the beauty – and praise the artist. And what about when you hold a newborn baby? Behold! Isn't this a miracle! Here is a whole new human being, fearfully and wonderfully made. And time can stop – as you hold and contemplate the wonder of life.

The Bible has a lot of beholding stories calling for contemplative awareness. One when Moses beholds a bush that's flaming. But it is not burning up! *Nec tamen consumebatur* says the international Latin Presbyterian motto – it is not consumed. This startling sight stops Moses. He 'beholds' and draws closer.

And as he beholds, Moses encounters God, and that encounter changes him completely. He hears and knows he is seen. And further down the track, it completely changes the future of his people.

To behold, isn't always to be startled though. 'Behold the Lamb of God', says John as he draws attention to Jesus. Can we behold the Lamb of God as we come to prayer? Is our intention to 'pray', or to behold the presence of Jesus with us? Is it to be present to him, as he is present with us? And can we behold he's making all things new, even our practice of prayer?

We have a culture where so much is shouting, 'Behold me. You need me, you want me, buy me. I will make you happy when you do.' There's nothing contemplative there. The soul knows and longs for much more.

In 1980 in response to this longing of souls, I was approached by the Rev Michael Thawley, then Convenor of the Parish Development and Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church. (I think it was Michael. The letter has been lost in the church archives). I was asked to explore a ministry in contemplative practice; to lead retreats, to teach about prayer, and promote spiritual growth. He asked me to consult with Catholics who were aware of a spiritual heritage of which many Protestants were ignorant.

Michael, and the committee were concerned church programs weren't feeding the spirit. We wanted to ensure there was an emphasis on inner transformation and availability to the dynamic loving presence of God from somewhere within the church.

This letter was my burning bush.

It spoke into the heart of my longing – to explore and draw on the wealth of our Christian heritage of prayer and spiritual practice. A desire that burned in me since studying medieval history for my undergraduate degree – discovering St Francis, St Bernard, John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen and many others. The letter brought into sharp focus my awakening to the dynamics of spiritual formation and spiritual direction in my post graduate degree at Princeton.

At a retreat on 'call' with the Church of the Saviour in Washington DC, I felt a call to minister in the area of spiritual formation – to lead retreats and seminars on prayer, work in spiritual direction and companion people on their faith journey.

God's timing was perfect.

Michael's letter was waiting for me on my return. I was thrilled. It was confirmation of the call to provide opportunities for seekers to open to a closer relationship with God – just what I longed to do

I spoke to my friend and colleague, the Rev Selwyn Jones and found he was right on board. Then we sounded out Anne Hadfield and the Rev Shirley Pyper who were also excited. After prayer, exploration, and consultation, we ran a retreat the next year and beheld the grace and goodness of God at work in eleven people. They were there to intentionally behold the presence and action of the Lord in their lives, and to practice contemplation.

This awakened awe and wonder in us and with that blessing and encouragement other retreats and events soon followed. In 1986, we decided to call the Spiritual Growth Workgroup, Spiritual Growth Ministries. We'd grown and we'd engaged others who knew what beholding the Holy Presence was.

In those first years, there was the Rev Neil Churcher, Sr Mary Concannon OP, the Rev Andrew and Margaret Dunn, Sr Judith Anne O'Sullivan OP, the Rev Marg Schrader, and Marion Taylor as administrator. Gradually others joined us. At first, we were Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic. As SGM grew ecumenically, we developed a spiritual director's training program, and created an association of Spiritual Directors, and even this journal, *Refresh*.

As a result, hundreds of people have been trained to exercise the ministry of spiritual direction and they have an uncalculatable number of Directees. Together, in the face of declining church membership, we seek the presence of God in the heart of contemplation – something a lot of 'church' isn't orienting us to.

As Anonymous, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* reminds us – God is to be loved, not thought. To contemplate is to be available to love and be loved.

I believe at the heart of contemplation is the prompting – the pull – to intentionally behold, to pay attention to Jesus, who is the human face of God. With him we can behold, and be open to the love of the Father, and welcome the active agency of the Spirit.

And as we read the stories of Jesus life in the gospels, we behold his compassion for the outcasts and the value and dignity he gave to women. As we see him on the cross, we behold him as he holds the suffering of humanity. And we behold the mystery, the wonder, the world changing event of the resurrection – contemplating with the heart more than the head.

Desmond Tutu once told Richard Rohr, 'We're only the light bulbs, and our job is just to remain screwed in!' Each time we pray, our habitual patterns of thinking and feeling inevitably interrupt and distract us from deep listening, but through our repeated failings we encounter God's grace – and experience a transformed, quieter mind.

*In contemplation, we let go our habitual thoughts, sensations, and feelings in order to connect to, and behold – the One who is Love.*

To stay plugged in, to desire to dwell in the heart of contemplative prayer is a practice for a lifetime, never perfected yet always enough. In contemplation we action our longing for a deeper silence. In contemplation, we let go our habitual thoughts, sensations, and feelings to connect to and behold the One who is Love. Psalm 27 reminds us to gaze on, to behold the beauty of the Lord.

Contemplation fruitfully anchors us. Sam Harvey named it in the last *Refresh*; 'it's being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did'. And in all simplicity, Darryl Tempero named the heart of contemplation – Rest. Notice. Be. Bless. In other words – Stop. Behold. Dwell. Pass it on.

Right there the blessing of encounter with God  
and God's good purposes for us.

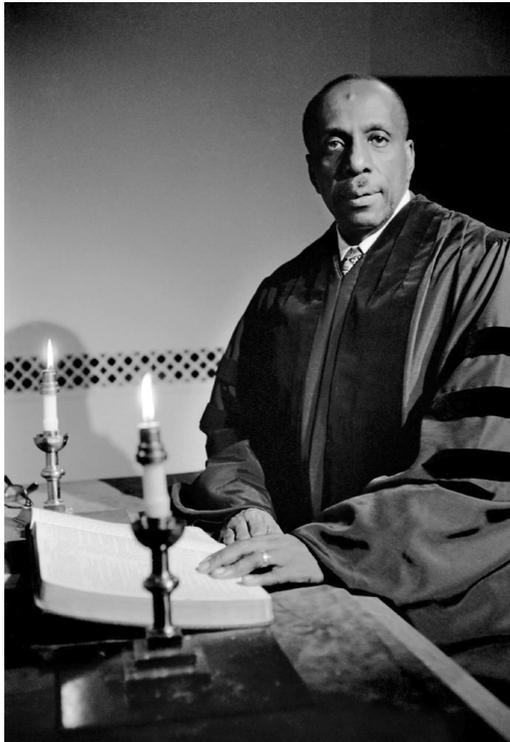
## The Invisible Line

As part of his study of mysticism, American Baptist preacher and theologian, Howard Thurman, attended Quaker meetings and sat in the silence that characterizes unscripted forms of Quaker worship.

In a 1951 sermon on the strength of silence in corporate worship, Thurman spoke of his personal experience of group silence during a traditional Quaker meeting:

'Nobody said a word ... just silence. Silence. Silence. And in that silence, I felt as though all of them were on one side and I was on the other side, by myself, with my noise. And every time I would try to get across the barrier, nothing happened. I was just Howard Thurman. And then ...

I don't know when it happened, how it happened, I wish I could tell you, but somewhere in that hour I passed over the invisible line, and I became one with all the seekers. I wasn't Howard Thurman anymore; I was, I was a human spirit involved in a creative moment with human spirits, in the presence of God.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Howard Thurman, 'The Strength of Corporate Worship,' sermon, April 8, 1951.

## What is the heart of contemplation for me?

by Margaret Gwynn

In one sense it's the daily choice to seek to open myself to the Loving Mystery in all things. To be aware – even though so much is silence.

I sometimes wonder if I would have persevered without the encouragement of the spiritual directors who companioned me.

Then, suddenly, there's a moment of absolute knowing. I often cry when this happens because it's been so long since the last time. Sometimes I laugh at its humour. Always – I'm taken by surprise. I can never take it for granted, never know when it will happen. But when it does, I feel deep connection, oneness, and I know that I am wholly loved and valued.

Often a rush of creativity follows. In the past I might have crafted a dance or time of worship with friends. Now it's more likely to be a poem or song or simply a few words of deep meaning. At the moment, I'm sitting with 'All is gift'. Not easy to say and mean – when I know it must include my painful knees and the wars in Ukraine and Israel.

Has this experience changed for me over time?

Well, in the early years of my spiritual journey, I was much more Jesus-focussed.

I would have expressed my experience in traditional Christian terms. But for many years now, my focus is always Creator, Sacred Mystery, the Love at the heart of the universe. And the sudden surprise of connection remains the same.

But there's more to the Heart of Contemplation than my experience of personal connection, infinitely precious though that is. A great work is called for:

'Wise are those who learn through silence,  
Learn then to listen well.  
For beyond the silence and stillness within,  
You will come to know a profound and dazzling Silence -  
herein lies the music of the spheres,  
The harmony of creation.  
Enter into the holy temple of your soul,  
Converse with the Beloved in sweet communion.  
Blessings of the Great Silence be with you  
**As you help to rebuild the heart of the world with love.**'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The last verses of Psalm 132 as rendered by Nan C. Merrill in *Psalms for praying*



© Reg Weeks

## On the Path of Contemplation

by Pamela Gordon

Contemplation is a way of listening,  
of 'being', before the 'doing'...  
From the stillness of contemplation  
intentions are born, they blossom,  
to later bear *fruit*

My creative process  
is also a contemplative practice,  
playing music, gardening,  
writing poetry, crafting,  
becoming absorbed, *inspired*

I'm conscious of the magic of a rainbow,  
I delight in a toddler's laughter,  
feel the warmth of a fire,  
savour the taste... hear the music...  
breathe in the *wonder*

Fully present, I'm aware of  
eternity in a starry night sky,  
transience in a hoar frost,  
simplicity in a snowdrop,  
being loved and *loving*

I contemplate the sacred in living things,  
acknowledge the spirit  
within everyone I meet,  
and recognise that I too,  
am part of this *oneness*

And when torn apart by worry,  
I take time to silently reflect,  
and with an open heart  
come to accept... what is,  
and live the *mystery*



© Diane Gilliam-Weeks

## Still Waters

by Tim Duxfield

Be. Still.

Be still | But I . . .  
Be still | What if I . . .  
Be still | How will I . . .

Be still . . .  
Still . . . until the sediment of my life settles  
and the waters of my mind clear  
and I hear the voice of Yahweh.

Be Still. Still.

## Deconstructing into wholeness Being in stillness

by Bob Holmes

When our personality falls off us like an old, tattered garment,  
we gain the possibility to be present,  
to just be in this eternal present,  
in our true self, our higher self, yes, who we really are.

Being in stillness is the stability of our lives,  
and when we practice presence,  
it brings a certainty to a life of constant change.

Our higher-self effortlessly expands in the stillness,  
in this liminal space, in this luminous web of the Spirit.

Next year let's remember Lent is a season we get to deconstruct,  
and disentangle ourselves not only from things,  
but becoming unattached from ourselves  
that we might enter into the mystery of being in Christ,  
connecting us into everything, even beyond all time and space.

Jesus says it this way:

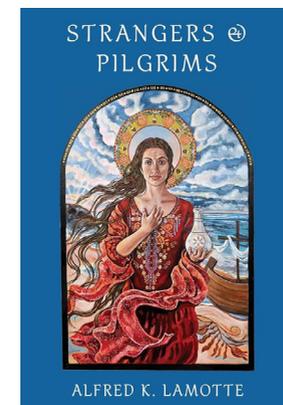
'Abide in me, and I in you, for apart from me, you can do nothing.'

It's time to live out of our higher self in Christ.

<https://contemplativemonk.substack.com/p/the-mystic-manifesto-unveiled>

## Sky in my body<sup>1</sup> by Fred LaMotte

I'm still searching for a Word  
to describe what it's like  
to discover the sky in my body  
between two breaths,  
what it's like to swirl through  
the blues in my rib cage,  
a Word to explain precisely  
how the immeasurable curve  
of the Milky Way  
shapes my eyeball,  
and a silent stream of stars  
pours all night down the hollows  
of my spine. Perhaps  
the Word is simply 'Friend',  
whispered, naming  
the one whose hand  
touches my chest  
like a feather on a cloud,  
or like a blade of honey  
so finely honed, my heart  
hardly knows  
it has been severed  
into 'I' and 'Thou'.



<sup>1</sup> ISBN-13: 9781955194211  
Publisher: Saint Julian Press, Inc.  
Publication date: 10/12/2023

## In Him we live and move and have our being

by Lesley Ayers

As I pondered the theme 'The Heart of Contemplation', Paul's quote from a Greek poet, in Acts 17:28 came to mind: 'for in Him we live and move and have our being'. At this stage of life, I find contemplation doesn't require me to draw away from society (though at times such retreats are welcome), but is rather a whole of life, everyday experience.

I admit to having an advantage over my more extroverted friends in that contemplation and reflection are part of my make up. The various personality trait assessments I encountered during my training as a counsellor all pointed to my being someone who is naturally reflective.

I see this in the child who'd look up at the stars and wonder about eternity, or through the branches of trees to delight in the delicate tracery of winter. That wonder is still with me, decades later.

Also pivotal is my family tradition of walking. I don't stick earbuds in my ears or listen to podcasts. Instead, as I walk, I notice the sounds of the birds, laughing children on their way to school, the swish of the skateboards, glimpses of small flowers by the pavement. Even the steady rhythm of passing traffic can lead to contemplation.

That wonder is there in a cafe where kind young staff bring me a Fairtrade coffee and I'm grateful. It's there as I get to know some 'regulars' among those sleeping rough on the downtown streets and wonder what their stories are.

It's there when I'm sitting in a long, slow stream of Tauranga traffic (recently winning the accolade 'worst congestion in the country') and on the radio comes a moment of towering beauty – as an oboist plays from Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*.

So, what 'voices' have played an important role in my faith journey? In seven decades of life there are sure to be many. They've come in many forms – books, emails, texts, and now – in keeping with technology's changes – in an app.

All these are my treasures which help keep me daily in the heart of contemplation. They come from many places and many people.

One inspiration – a homegroup exploring a contemporary way to follow the Benedictine Rule: the rhythm of the days, the emphasis on hospitality and the balance of work and prayer. Though I don't strictly follow the disciplines of the monks, I think the Rule has influenced my whole-of-life understanding of contemplation.

Another voice is young English poet and environmentalist, Gideon Heugh. For some years I've followed the daily Lenten and Advent reflections from TEAR Fund UK. Gideon's voice has time and again impacted on how I see things:



© Millisa Bliss

## Magnolia

*'You could look to the world, with its nail-biting,  
its in-fighting, its despair and doom-and-gloom.  
Or you could look to the magnolia,  
whose hundred soft hearts are blooming.'*

Gifted by a young American friend, Dallas Willard's Biblical reflections *Hearing God through the Year* are my constant companions. Willard's 'voice' has quietly and gently challenged and encouraged me to a life walked daily in the presence of God.

Lockdown brought another treasure. A friend in Christchurch sent me some prayer resources. One prayer was luminous for me. It greets God afresh each new morning. It finishes with,

*'This is the day I begin my life anew  
shine through me so that every person I meet may feel Your presence in me.  
Take my hand, precious Lord, for I cannot make it by myself. Amen'*

And now, to the current voice that is holding me and keeping me through these global times of anxiety and uncertainty. Aptly, it comes in an app. Three months ago, out of the blue, a good friend texted me, 'Are you familiar with an app called *Lectio 365*? The presenter (Pete Grieg) is currently on pilgrimage from Iona to Lindisfarne. I thought you'd like it so will send the link'.

Thus began an amazing pilgrimage experience – 'seeing' the scenery, hearing the history, and following in the footsteps of 7<sup>th</sup> century Celtic saint, Aidan – provide 'bookends' to my day. Each morning *Lectio 365* helps me be still and focus on God through prayer and scripture. Then I go out into the day with these life-giving words:

*'Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You in every way.  
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.  
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen'*

Every evening *Lectio 365* encourages me to Examen – to think about where God's been at work in my life that day and receive the forgiveness of God for thoughts or deeds I regret. It ends each day with:

*'God of all seasons, the sun has set, the night has gathered in,  
my soul sinks slowly into Your rest,  
trusting now in the resurrection to come. Amen'*

I sleep well.

On Sundays I find Pete Grieg's sabbath blessing profoundly moving:

*'May the gravity of material things be lightened,  
and the relativity of time slow down.  
May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness  
in the arms of God's infinite greatness'*

And with that I come full circle, back to the twelve-year-old who loved to look at the stars and think about infinity.



## O Pilgrim of the Hours by Macrina Weiderkehr

*'To pray is to touch God and let God touch us. It's a matter of presence and response. Prayer does nothing to make God more present, for God is always present. Prayer is our response to the presence of God in our lives'.<sup>1</sup>*

Each morning night's curtain opens on a new day.  
You are invited to join the great opening.  
Open your ears.  
Open your heart.  
Open your eyes  
to the sacred path you travel every day,  
the path of the hours.

Greet the hours with joyful awareness.  
Greet the hours with faithful presence.  
Greet the hours with a reverential bow.  
Greet the hours with a sacred pause.

Reverence each hour as a small stepping stone  
on your pilgrimage through the day.  
Receive the gift of seven sacred pauses.  
Practice waking up seven times a day.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Macrina Wiederkehr's definition of prayer

<sup>2</sup> Macrina Wiederkehr (2008), *Seven Sacred Pauses*, Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 16-17



## The Hasty Contemplative: *the spirituality of street photography* by Stephen Garner

*Being out on the street making pictures is a time to be in your head. It's a chance to leave everything behind. In one sense, you're absorbed by what you're doing, but at the same time you're totally aware of what's happening, tuned in and switched on.*

Matt Stuart, *Think Like a Street Photographer* (2021): 13.

I'm not a natural contemplative. While I tend toward introversion and I'm comfortable in silence and solitude, I've never been able to consistently nurture the focused inner life that marks descriptions of contemplation as deep, still reflection with a singular focus. There have been times when I've been close to that, but mostly my mind is constantly in motion, darting from one thing to another as it seeks to find patterns and connections between things – integrating them into design that makes sense of the world and my own place within it.

It's this continual process of synthesis that leads me to describe myself primarily as a 'synthetic theologian', bringing together all manner of disparate things into a dialogue with the Christian faith with a view to seeing how they all fit together.

That's not to say I'm unaware of various spiritual practices regarding contemplation. I have over the years explored them in various contexts, including studying and teaching Christian spirituality in faith-based and secular higher education settings.

Some might say my inability to settle into a particular contemplative practice is due to a lack of self-discipline or an unwillingness to let go of certain ways of thinking and reflecting. While there may be an element of truth in that, I find myself, much like both theologians Kathryn Tanner (1994) and Douglas Hall (2003), thinking about everything all of the time because all that is in the heavens and the earth must be understood in relation to God and faith.

Thus, in the midst of a particular spiritual exercise, I find myself wrestling to maintain focus on the moment of the exercise – in the face of my mind wanting to ask questions about the exercise itself, its relationship to all sorts of other things. It's an ongoing process of shifting my experiences and thoughts to add to my own personal synthesis that explains and orders those. All this means many typical forms of contemplation become either a source of conflict or hard to maintain over time, even with practice.

Therefore, I've been pleasantly surprised to find I started to develop what I call a form of 'hasty contemplation' that finds its roots in my rediscovery of photography in urban contexts. As a university student, I had an old single-lens reflex camera. I carried this around to record friends, family, and events. Only in the last five or so years have I taken to always having a camera on me again (besides my smartphone), and I use the camera to narrate aspects of everyday life. In part, this came about through needing to process my experiences while visiting my father in hospital for the last year of his life. In many ways, photography became a therapeutic outlet for me during that time.

Since then, photography continues to help my mental well-being by combining observations of the everyday urban world with physical exercise – not to mention interesting encounters and conversations with people.

This falls into the category of photography that has therapeutic benefits (therapeutic photography), rather than directed medical or therapeutic practices that use photography (phototherapy) (Saita & Tramontano, 2018).

As I mentioned earlier, the photography I tend to do is in everyday urban (and suburban) environments. I might shoot landscapes and scenery, animals, or events. But mostly the rhythm of my photography is directed by where I'm walking today and what I encounter. This broadly falls into the genre of 'street photography' which aims to capture something of the humans who live there, visible or invisible – happening within what Sallie McFague calls 'second nature' which we've built on top of the natural world's 'first nature' our primary habitat (McFague, 2008).

Sometimes this kind of photography is candid or confrontational – intimately capturing people in the moment. Sometimes it focuses on the geometry or juxtaposition of urban structures and the people within them. And sometimes it documents the history of a particular time and place. The dominant theme, though, is that it tells and offers stories about the people in a particular moment and place.

I didn't set out to do this kind of photography, but fell into it – as I began, with increasing intention, to record things I noticed in my local community, and my travels overseas which connected to my research and teaching.

Alongside capturing images related to my father and hospital, other influences shaped my practice of 'hasty contemplation' – including spiritual.

Several years earlier, I had the good fortune to ask the late Andrew Norton to lecture in my Theology and Media course. Andrew – Presbyterian minister, poet, and photographer – kindly brought canvases of prints and digital photos. He discussed with the class how photography played a role in his life and faith – while showcasing his journey with nature and landscape photography.

Andrew warned us, the language of photography can be violent – words like 'taking', 'framing', and 'capturing' – so we must respect the dignity of people and places to avoid objectifying and diminishing them.

Andrew's work had a slowness in it – working with seasons and deep time present in landscapes – quite different from the bustle of street photography. It was interesting to see how his reflections worked their way out in my students' photography.

Similarly, Catholic theologian, Eileen Crowley's work on photography and spiritual life has also been influential. I first met Eileen in 2015 at the annual Theology and Communication conference at Santa Clara University. At the 2017 conference, Eileen presented on 'media storytelling as ministry', including her *Photovoice* project. She focused on digitally mediated storytelling as part of a cycle of grace to support

human flourishing – particularly helping small groups in churches explore their local communities through photography and letting those observations inform their individual and communal spiritual reflection and formation (Crowley, 2014).

On her website showcasing this approach, Crowley notes:

'usually, a small group is effective when it has 8-12 people participating ... just enough to gather around a big table. This size group allows everyone a chance to speak meeting face-to-face. Ours will be a holy conversation around the experience of making and sharing images. Our small group process trusts the Holy Spirit is with us at every stage. Over the course of our weeks together we will improve our photography skills. More importantly, though, through practicing the art of photography we will simultaneously be practicing the art of spiritual and theological reflection. Our reflections will arise naturally from the experience of taking and contemplating our photographs.' (Crowley, 2013)

In her book on photography as a Christian contemplative practice, Christine Valters Paintner adapts Rohr's threefold understanding of visions, starting with his idea of first seeing the world with our senses, then seeing it through our intellectual understanding, and finally at a deeper affective level – with our hearts.

*Ours will be a holy conversation around the experience of making and sharing images.*

For Paintner, the first kind of vision is what we see through the camera lens, which leads to the second when composing the picture and taking it, with the final vision related prayerfully to our response to the image. This is a helpful way to think about contemplation and photography – though I'd put different emphases on the three visions.

For example, I'd widen the *first vision* to incorporate full sensory encounter with the locality: the feel of the street through the soles of my shoes, smells associated with that location, the climate of the day, the coffee I'm drinking as I shoot, and finally what I'm seeing through the lens and in my peripheral vision. It's immersion in a particular time and place and can be layered through repeat visits.

Then I'd relate my editing process to the *second vision* – when I'm making decisions how to best adjust things like colour, exposure, and framing on my computer to highlight features in the image.

Coming to the *third vision* with all that done – I just sit with the image – examining how it speaks to me and to others. In this way, 'hasty contemplation' is photographing in the immediacy and bustle of an immersive urban environment, followed by increasingly slower engagement.

By way of illustration, I chose three photographs I took walking around Newmarket earlier this year. I was there shooting in black and white for an online project for *Framelines* street photography community. I took many pics that day, but only a handful continue to sit with me as the year progresses.

The first image is of a woman stepping off a bus and into a 'spotlight' of the autumn sun – see the facing page of this article. I shot this from the hip without focusing because I caught it out of the corner of my eye as it happened – hasty contemplation in action. In the photo, her foot is caught just above the ground, and I'm left wondering what happens next. Does she turn left or right? Is she heading home or to work? Will she save someone's life today, cook dinner, or both? Her identity is hidden – a passing moment in the bustle of commuting – and yet her image stays with me. Sometimes I pray for her, wondering if I'll see her again and how many commuters might be 'angels in disguise'?



© Stephen Garner

The second photo connects with my love of geometry, reflections, and perspective in urban environments. It was a quick snap of a standard multistory office building, all concrete, glass and steel, hoping the reflection might develop nicely in editing. But, when I slowed down to edit the photograph, I noticed the silhouette of a man looking out the window emerging at the bottom of the frame. Coming back to this photograph regularly, I'm made aware of those around us who are hidden unless we stop and take the time to look.

Finally, the third photo was taken as I walked through the part of Newmarket that's dotted with Asian markets and eateries. Here the fullness of Rohr's 'first vision' is present with the smells of the markets, truck fumes, food and spices meeting with the textures of the street, conversations around me, and the light changing as I duck into covered walkways.



© Stephen Garner

Here, unlike the other two photos, a man is identifiable and aware of me as I walk through snapping the photograph without breaking stride.

His hat, emblazoned with the word, 'MAN', becomes more pronounced in editing and printing. In contemplation, I'm thinking of human beings bearing the image and likeness of God and whether this man is treated by myself and others with the dignity that entails.

I said at the start, I'm not a natural contemplative, and by that, I meant I've found various contemplative practices both difficult and, in some ways, inappropriate for me. That doesn't mean I won't continue to work on them. But I'm encouraged I found a

practice that combines the hasty bustle of my mind in street photography with a slowing down to contemplative editing and reflection of those images captured on the street. The practice is both self-reflective and outward-looking, helping me observe both my inner life in relation to God and the expression of that life in the everyday community, especially with the strangers I meet there.

The very focus of street photography leads me to a contemplative spirituality that seeks the subjectivity of those I photograph – rather than an abstract or utilitarian objectivity. For that, I'm grateful.

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## Natural Contemplation

by Mike Coleman

I remember Spring sitting in the park next door. Me and my big old leather football waiting for friends to play. As I waited, I'd lie on my stomach and put my head down to smell the newly cut grass. I'd pick a piece and feel its rubbery, slippery texture between my fingers.

It was magic lying in the field, sun on my head, being a kid. I never realised at the time how lovely this quiet, doing nothing time was. Pure nature sitting by me, doing something inside me.

St Basil of Caesarea wrote in the 4th Century – the Divine touches us when the eyes of our souls experience the beauty of creation.<sup>1</sup> 'Natural Contemplation is the capacity of humanity to see traces of God's wisdom and beauty in visible realities'.<sup>2</sup> God touches us when we experience nature because God's fingerprint and very presence is in every created thing. My sitting on the grass was prayer. I was communing with the Creator, allowing myself to be touched by the divine without even knowing it.

As St Basil says, the first book written by God is the Book of Nature. It's the first revealer of the divine. And Paul in Romans, 'Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, though invisible, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.'<sup>3</sup>

As a child, being formed by the Book of Nature was a daily experience. It was normal to play in parks, climb trees, walk hilly tracks, run on beaches, and tramp bushy mountain creeks. I was playing in God's playground. What was natural for me and millions of kids around the world is now confirmed scientifically as the ideal. Children, adults, all humanity need to be out in creation. Today seventeen hundred years after St Basil, neuroscience confirms what he knew in his soul – nature does something in us.

In the 2022 study 'How nature nurtures', researchers found 'amygdala activation decreases after a walk-in nature'.<sup>4</sup> The amygdala, which activates during times of stress, decreases away from urban environments. Simply going for a walk on green grass deescalates the subcortical areas in your brain.

Nature calms us, frees us, forms us into better human beings. Nature does something inside us – shaping us to be the humans we were created to be. Sure, all scientists don't attribute this to a Creator, but they're scientifically affirming we creatures need to be in creation. Our most natural place is to be in natural space.

Decades on, I'm sitting in my counsellor office in front of a fourteen year-old. They're struggling to get to assembly and can't go to certain classes: 'I have no friends there'. The web of anxiety has entangled them into an emotional mess. They break down into stress so fast. I've been an adolescent counsellor for twenty years. It wasn't like this ten years ago. The average student didn't experience this level of anxiety.

Years ago, high-level presentation came from trauma and environmental dysfunction. Today teens nervous systems' trigger at what seems to others as normal life events. We clinicians are taught to use breathing and mindfulness to calm the subcortical areas of the brain (amygdala).

It feels like the mental health system is formalising what earlier generations found calming in their natural existence. Sundays out walking with the family by a river did us wonders. Playing in creeks, strolling lush bush, rolling down sand hills, jumping through waves – helps our insides because we're created this way.

We can't change our nervous system. When it fires up, it needs to calm down to stay balanced. Constant firing creates stress and becomes overwhelming. We're now at a point in human existence where our new technological society is out of tune with the way we're created. And we've created a society where we struggle to maintain our own peace and sanity.

*We're now at a point in our existence where our new technological society is out of tune with the way we're made.*

Today, new therapeutic modalities are forming to connect adolescents to nature. Ecotherapy or green therapy teach – when we enter nature – the earth has a self-righting capacity to change us. As St Basil would say natural contemplation is powerful – as in it our deepest selves can be touched by our Creator.

These new therapies affirm the power for change inherent in the natural world, but not the creator behind it. The 'natural philosophers' as St Basil calls them, observe the beauty of nature shining before them – but Beauty itself is the truly desirable One.

Natural contemplation takes hold within us when we're open to communing with the one who made it. This is pure contemplation – opening ourselves to the presence of God. Not just seeing the waters but experiencing the breath of God hovering over the waters.

Last week, I sat on a park bench by the roses in our beautiful botanical gardens. It was lovely contemplating in the beauty and quietness, but even better when my wife sat down next to me. The beauty of the moment was magnified. A sharing with the one I love. As St Teresa of Avila said, 'contemplative prayer...is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.'<sup>5</sup>

Pure contemplation is opening ourselves to the presence of God in the sea breeze, the roar of the stream and crash of the ocean. It's the intimacy of Creator and created – lover and beloved.

The one who loves and accepts us – is the one at the heart of all contemplation.

## Next Time: Matariki

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*Psalms 19:1*

Matariki is a time of paying close attention to the stars as harbingers of a new season. Our ancient texts remind us that God created the heavens, and indeed, that wise ones attuned their hearts and paths to a bright star that pointed to the dawning of New Life for all.

This gift of this new national holiday for all New Zealanders honours our indigenous people and is grounded in the wisdom of a close relationship with creation. *What resonances do you discover here with your own contemplative journey?*

The Matariki Advisory Committee offered three principles to guide the people of Aotearoa, New Zealand in celebrating Matariki.

- 1: Remembrance – Honouring those we have lost since the last rising of Matariki.
- 2: Celebrating the present – Gathering together to give thanks for what we have.
- 3: Looking to the future – Looking forward to the promise of a New Year.

*How might we explore the contemplative dimensions of these rich themes?*

Could Matariki be a blessed invitation to pay attention – to the rhythms of creation, to our gardens, to caring for the earth? Can we embrace the call to gather – to honour loved ones who have passed on, to celebrate all that we have, and to make plans for the future?

*How might we deeply connect with the God of all creation in this season?*

*How might Matariki inspire and enrich our contemplative practice?*

Contributors, please send your submission by Feb 16th, 2024 to Kathryn Overall-Cass at [kathryn@sgm.org.nz](mailto:kathryn@sgm.org.nz).

### Guidelines for Contributors

- Keep submissions to fewer than 2000 words
- Send as a Word document
- Leave one space between sentences
- Use single quotation marks
- Be conversational in style
- Use conjunctions where possible
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes
- Use inclusive language wherever possible
- Send images as attachments and at least 2MB
- Send a brief bio (40 words) and head and shoulders photo, also high resolution

1 'Natural Contemplation in St Basil of Caesarea' by Rev. Dr. Enrico Cattaneo, SJ. <https://osbmcommission.wordpress.com/list-of-conferences/natural-contemplation-in-st-basil-of-caesarea/>

2 Ibid

3 Romans 1:20

4 Sudimac, S., Sale, V. & Kühn, S. How nature nurtures: Amygdala activity decreases as the result of a one-hour walk in nature. *Mol Psychiatry* 27, 4446–4452 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-022-01720-6>

5 *St Teresa of Avila: The Book of Her Life, ch. 8, 5.*

## Insights from the *Refresh* Reader Survey

Thanks to all who took our June *Refresh* Reader Survey. The clearest insight to emerge: *Refresh* is serving older members of the SGM community well. There were huge heartfelt comments about the value *Refresh* offers as a source of inspiration, nourishment, and belonging to contemplative community.

The data shows 93.1% of readers are 50yrs+, 74.3% are 60yrs+, and 43.1% of readers are 70yrs+. Fewer than 7% of *Refresh* readers are 40yrs or younger. These numbers give us a sense of gratitude and care for the faithful core of contemplative pioneers and practitioners in our SGM community, and an impetus to evolve – so *Refresh* can connect with upcoming generations of contemplatives and spiritual seekers.

**A key question we're asking ourselves was:** Should we continue to produce *Refresh* in print given rising production and postage costs? How would people feel if *Refresh* were available only online?

Well, the people spoke loud and clear! 72% of readers prefer *Refresh* continue as a print publication. Of these, 44% strongly preferred print.

The reasons for this fell into key themes:

- A print version is a physical resource that can be shared with others.
- A desire to receive spiritual nourishment away from phones and computers.
- A sense that print is a contemplative medium that enhances reading and practice.

Typical comments from readers:

*'I'd be very disappointed to lose Refresh in print. The photos, covers, having something in your hand to pick up and put down, take with you other places, pass on to others, is for me - VITAL!'*

*'I'd really, really miss being able to sit and hold a printed page without the aid of technology. A hard copy helps me linger longer and somehow be more still and quiet. To me, it would be almost similar to looking at an image of the New Zealand bush compared to walking in it!'*

**Another question we asked:** If you value *Refresh* as a print publication, would you consider making an annual donation?

Analysis shows around 12% of people on the *Refresh* mailing list already make a regular donation. If we could grow this percentage, it would make a huge difference to our SGM budget. We're so grateful to the relatively small group of people who support *Refresh* financially and in the process – sustain the community of readers it serves. Thank you!

If you'd like to add your support, we invite you to consider making an annual donation of \$30-\$50. Donations can be made by visiting [www.sgm.org.nz/donate](http://www.sgm.org.nz/donate) or via online banking. (Spiritual Growth Ministries 03-0166-0198782-00. Add your name/town as reference and *Refresh* in particulars)

For further insights, please visit [www.sgm.org.nz/refresh-readers](http://www.sgm.org.nz/refresh-readers)

## SGM News – Investing in our future

Tena koutou e whānau o SGM, I write in the midst of tragic events unfolding in the Middle East. Long unresolved and intransigent conflicts again erupt with devastating impact on children and families. Into this space where we in Aotearoa can feel distant and powerless, I'm reminded of Cynthia Bourgeault's encouragement that through contemplative practice and surrender we can experience God's mystical hope and become a healing presence to our world.

SGM continues to be in a time of transition strategically investing in our future – treasuring our whakapapa while contemplatively discerning where we're being invited. Our survey of *Refresh* readers reported 93% of readers are over 50 and 75% over 60 – a faithful group of contemplatives! This adds impetus to our efforts to reach younger generations, while treasuring the taonga of existing readers.

We made a significant impact on the average age of Workgroup, welcoming our wonderful new Administrator, Jenna Edgar. We believe, Jenna will build on the strong systems our highly competent retiring Administrator, Adrienne Bruce, developed. Thank you Adrienne for your huge contribution to SGM.

We continue to invest in our future, granting Fran Francis three month sabbatical in 2024 in recognition of her fruitful seven year tenure (so far!) as National Co-ordinator for the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. When she returns, Fran hopes to invest in our growing Singaporean cohort of past and present students by providing professional development and dialoguing about future Singapore-based opportunities.

Kathryn Overall-Cass continues to grow our online presence and advance us towards our strategic objective of reaching more diverse audiences through her excellent blog interviews, e-newsletters and Facebook posts. We've expanded her role to include oversight of all SGM Communications. As Kaitiaki of Communications, Kathryn will oversee *Refresh* and grow an editorial team as it evolves. Deep gratitude to Diane Gilliam-Weeks who came out of retirement to edit the last two issues of *Refresh* and continues in an advisory capacity.

We assure *Refresh* readers we heard how much you value the print version! Can I make an invitation? The ministry of SGM in its various expressions relies on donations. If you value *Refresh*, would you consider an annual gift of \$30-\$50 to SGM? This support will make a meaningful difference to SGM's budget. Plus, you'd be investing in the next generation as we encourage a wider diversity of readers and contributors in *Refresh* and online.

Thank you SGM community for the generous \$10,000 raised through our Matariki Appeal. This had a big impact on our operating budget this year.

And so with this mystical hope in the unseen, the pulse of truth that sends us forth, we embrace our future. Ma te Atua koutou e manaaki.

Bruce Maden (Convenor)

## Latest from SGM

### Spiritual Directors Formation Programme

In a time, people are seemingly more polarised than ever, the non-dual, contemplative path offers us a way to be with others. Not just any way but something the Ancients called 'The Way'. In the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme, we work *kanohi ki te kanohi* – trainers and participants – revealing our inner selves to one another in trust that God is mediating the exchange.

We are Māori, Samoan, Asian and Pākehā; of course, we have our 'poles' but we actively venture away from them. At our residential training earlier this year – the first since Covid – we welcomed people from Pakistan, Singapore and Malaysia. The potency of vulnerability between and across culture coalesced in profound moments of 'aha' and spiritual growth.

At the *Kohanga Ako* week we bear witness to each other's wounds, joys, and bewilderment. We speak to each other in our various accents, we must listen closely. We ask clarifying questions rather than let something we haven't quite grasped slide by – it might be important. This takes courage – and we see a lot of it at the residential week. And courage, of course, has its roots in love.

Speaking of love, both the formation programme and SGM have benefitted from your aroha; we thank you for your generosity and prayer. It's a hard time for all learning bodies – just look at our universities and know smaller training entities are wondering how to navigate the post-Covid economic turmoil too.

We're in this together. In your reflective, generous embrace of silence and willing immersion in Love – I wonder, when you look around your friends and whānau, who you see who is a good listener? Whose presence invites people to open up a bit? Who – and it could be *you* – is ready for a formation journey as a spiritual director in 2024? We're ready to help with that discernment. The application form on our website is the best next step for anyone interested in the programme.

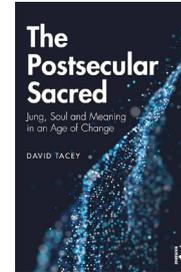
And in the pipeline we have a new spiritual formation course for those keen to deepen their prayer and broaden their experience of Christian spiritual practices. We are after all, Spiritual Growth Ministries – tending the *wairuatanga* of contemplative Christians is what we do.

Ki te kotahi te kākaho, ka whati; ki te kāpuia, e kore e whati.

When a reed stands alone it is vulnerable,  
but a group of reeds together is unbreakable.

From Fran Francis with love

## Books to nourish your spirit and practice



### *The Postsecular Sacred*

*Jung, Soul and Meaning in an Age of Change* by David Tacey

Published by Routledge

Reviewer Margie Upson

'Growing up in our world has become almost synonymous with throwing out God, and religion can seemingly offer no resistance. It asks us to cling to a childlike faith. But where, today, is the religion for adults? Who is going to give this new religious awareness?'

What a challenge for Spiritual Directors who accompany people to find their own adult version of who God is and to whom they intuitively pray. This book has given me sound scaffolding to engage with people seeking Christian faith in a society which is increasingly post-secular. And it confirms the place of contemplative gifts as needed, valued and timely for this work.

'Post secular spirituality...realizes there is mystery and presence in the ordinary world...the new universal interest in meditation and contemplative activities relate to this hunger for direct experience'.

Mysticism is seen as the vital way to experience God in this changing world. 'There can be no religiousness without mystical interiority'. Tacey agrees with Rahner's 'the future Christian will be a mystic, or they won't exist at all', defining mysticism as 'a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our experience'.

As a Jungian scholar, Tacey looks at the resurgence of Jung's belief in the place of the soul and the need to nurture it – 'the soul is the vessel that contains spirit and makes it personal'. What we're seeing is a change of consciousness in modern societies where science and commerce have failed to fill the 'God shaped gap' – to paraphrase St Augustine.

This book gives a rich framework to Tacey's thought and research coming out of his lived experience in Australian secular society. Its exploration of the sacred is wide, including quantum physics, ecopsychology, and aboriginal spirituality. Tacey also notes a darker element of the post secular sacred – religion gone rigid and vehement – where acts of terrorism are hawked as sacrifice.

Tacey still champions church symbols and rituals aiding us in the worship of God as the 'best possible expression of things as yet unknown'. He puts these alongside the understanding that Creation itself is revelatory of God's presence.

As one of the most startling examples of this contemporary shift in thinking, Tacey follows the life of French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Once part of the 'god is dead' school, Derrida's thought was instrumental in underpinning much of modern education. In later life, 'as he was drawn back to parts of his childhood faith – it was as if he could feel and intuit something mystical behind the realm of appearances, although he stops short of naming these as God.' This 180° shift in belief features in the lives of other leading scientists and philosophers.

As the major architect of deconstruction, Derrida proposes that in our faith or absence of it, there's also need for deconstruction, just as he himself did. 'One may not find one's God without first looking at the old images, and even beholding the absence of a God.' Quoting Meister Eckhart, 'In order to find God, you first have to lose him!'

[David Tacey was invited by the ACSD to visit New Zealand for a forum in 2020 when Covid prevented that happening.]



***Returning to Eden - a field guide for the spiritual journey***  
by Heather Hamilton  
Published by Quoir  
Reviewer Megan Blakie

An appealing and intriguing book on a personal and professional level and certainly deserving of a re-read for this reviewer. Essentially, *Returning to Eden* offers a psychological lens on the Bible – especially the parables and actions of Jesus, and some Old Testament stories. US author and former evangelical, Heather Hamilton, invites us to unearth the potency of scripture through its 'mythical' quality (not to be confused with folklore or fiction). We're encouraged to seek the deeper psychological and spiritual truths it holds – which in turn offer great application for spiritual direction.

In ancient civilisations, the meaning of the story was far more sacred and important, than the literal truth of the details. [Biblical stories] '...provide clues by which we might navigate the inner workings of our psyches, yielding insights into our behaviours, addictions, neuroses, longings, and meanings of our particular and collective life...a "road map" to navigate our deep inner landscape...'

The book's three sections are interwoven with the life of the author and the spiritual crisis that altered her spiritual trajectory. The introduction outlines Hamilton's psychological framework and explains Biblical 'myth'; the second section explores Jesus and his teaching; the third is a sort of 'where to from here' for our own lives.

It's a gift of 'a-ha' moments and a refreshing way to understand the Bible. Perhaps a doorway for those seeking an understanding of faith – less obsessed with historicity and literalism. I had some discomfit with the Jungian 'false self' in the psychological framework; but a wise friend (enamoured with family systems theory) suggested 'small self' might be less self-critical to juxtapose with 'true self' – being at one with God.

I was riveted how Hamilton transforms the well-worn stories of my Christian tradition. I relate to her proposition that resurrection is the ongoing pattern of the universe. And for the first time, some of Paul's more impenetrable writings are starting to make sense to me. *Returning to Eden* both deconstructs and reconstructs Christian terminology and understanding and will resonate with Directees and Directors seeking new tools for their faith and practice. Happy excavating!



***The Ever-Widening Circles* by Marg Schrader**  
Publisher: Philip Garside Publishing LTD ([www.philipgarsidebooks.com](http://www.philipgarsidebooks.com))  
Available in print and eBook editions  
Reviewer: Leanne Munro

'Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here', Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*. Thus, begins chapter two. Thank goodness Marg's story has finally been told in her words!

This is a book like no other. A deeply personal story. A story where life, community and faith are interwoven in a way that's natural, practical, honest, full of compassion and a sense of adventure – surprising no one who knows Marg. Ten years in the creating, this memoir is part life-story, part God-story. It's the ever-widening circles of Marg's life as she follows God's call, and theological rumination of the best sort!

This memoir, while the story of a life, is also a strong commentary on social and church history at a particular time, in a particular place. Most of all, it's about what matters most to Marg, as she journeyed with the One she calls 'an amazing friend'.

From teacher to Methodist Deaconess and chaplain, from Australia to New Zealand, from mother and wife to Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PCANZ, and on into offering Spiritual Direction and exploring Interfaith conversations.

We share Marg's memories growing up, meeting Warren and becoming mother to a ready-made family; her co-ministry at Wadestown Presbyterian and how that faith community supported her family; her co-creation *The Still Point* retreat place and her work there with Srs. Judith Anne O'Sullivan and Yvonne Munro (no relation!). Stories of shared Sacred Space worship. We're privy to her time as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid 1990's and the deeply human issues the church still struggles with today.

Chapter 11 is her final paper for Spiritual Director Training in the USA: 'The Effect of Sexual Abuse on Women's Naming and Experiencing of God'. I found this poignant considering the Royal Commission on Abuse in State and Faith Based Care, here in NZ. Chapter 12 deals with dreams and dream therapy, which I found helpful. Chapter 14 is her keynote address to the PCANZ General Assembly in 2018 – I don't know if our church has listened.

Marg writes of an unconventional relationship with the Church, feeling on the edge of the church in terms of her ministry – a sense familiar to those of us not in parish ministry, but still in ministry. With humour and honesty, she deals with the challenges of aging, transition and change. *The Ever-Widening Circles* is a story of faith, gentle strength, communities, connections, love and grace. A story of God's call answered by one woman who sought to live it out honestly and courageously.

Thank you, Marg, for sharing with us – finally!

## Contributors

**Paul Fromont** now lives in Tūtūkākā with his wife Gita, their December 2022 move north and east from the Waikato, the realisation of a long-held dream to live on the coast, to live more simply, and to delight in being closer to nature.

**Abi Travathan** is a wife and mum of three who is currently finishing off her Graduate Diploma in Theology. She spends much less time wandering than she'd like, but is learning to listen better – with mixed results!

**Andrew Dunn** and wife Margaret worked with the United Church in Papua New Guinea for eleven years. Returning to NZ in 1980 they were called to St Stephen's Herne Bay. After twelve years they went full time as spiritual directors – running retreats and developing their Oasis Retreat Centre near Albany. Andrew now lives in Settlers Retirement Village near there.

**Katrina Tulip** is a spiritual director based in Tauranga and coordinator of the Bay of Plenty spiritual directors' group. She's learning to live in an unhurried fashion – likes reading, gardening, and exploring outdoors with a camera in hand. She's a creative dabbler more used to illustrating her husband Phillip's poems than writing her own.

**John Franklin** loves to sit with Jesus, cook for family and friends, get soil on his hands, and when they're clean, make music on his beautiful Yamaha piano. He's blessed with a very capable family, and delights in grandchildren. He founded what became Spiritual Growth Ministries in 1980, and is still actively engaged in spiritual direction, ministry supervision, preaching and celebrating in the Anglican Diocese of Dunedin.

**Margaret Gwynn** loves reading, gardening and watching the changing patterns of sea and sky. She is learning to live with arthritis.

**Pamela Gordon** writes poetry to explore the deeper meaning of such concepts as joy, grief, love, loss, silence, time, contemplation. She reduces them to their essence and this helps her to understand, and come to terms with, the vagaries of life at this time.

**Tim Duxfield** is married to Kim, and father to two young sons, Micah, and Levi. They are an Anglican priest who writes from their wrestle with silence. There they meet God. There they meet themselves. The dissonance between the two comes out, occasionally, as poetry.

**Bob Holmes** is Christian Mystic, Franciscan, Fluent in Evangelical, Charismatic, and Liturgical. Presently in Spiritual Direction at the Haden Institute because of a quantum entanglement when teaching on being a mystic at the Wild Goose Festival. Presently writing and working at [contemplativemonk.com](http://contemplativemonk.com)

**Fred LaMotte** has published five volumes of poetry. He teaches university courses in World Religions, gathers poetry circles, and shares the grace of meditation with those who work with him. Fred lives with his wife Anna near Seattle.

**Lesley Ayers** lives in Tauranga with husband John. She's deeply grateful at this stage of life she's well enough to live a very full life and loves the challenge of learning new skills. After publication of her book, *God Moments in an Ordinary Life* in 2020 she took a break from writing and has taken up art. Much to her surprise (having been hopeless at school) she's steadily improving.

**Stephen Garner** is Academic Dean and Senior Lecturer in Theology at Laidlaw College, New Zealand and Senior Research Fellow at the Australian College of Theology. His teaching and research engage with theology, technology, media, and ethics. He's married to Kim and worships at Massey Presbyterian. You can find his blog at [www.greenflame.org](http://www.greenflame.org) and his pics on Instagram at [@kiwigreenflame](https://www.instagram.com/kiwigreenflame).

**Mike Coleman** lives in Christchurch with wife Robyn, loves spending time with his children and grandchildren and enjoys writing, cycling, and walking. He works as a Guidance Counsellor at St Andrew's College as private practise Counselling, Supervision and Spiritual Direction. He's an Anglican Priest in Christchurch Diocese.

**Kathryn Overall-Cass** is a spiritual director, website creator and songwriter from Tauranga Moana. She deeply loves the contemplative stream and finds its flow in her marriage, garden, kitchen and playing with her nieces.

**Fran Francis** as national co-ordinator of SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme, Fran is committed to collaborating with God to develop spiritual direction skills in others.

**Bruce Maden** (SGM Convenor) lives in Palmerston North. He and his wife Elizabeth have been deeply committed to solidarity with disadvantaged communities and being an incarnational presence within them. He also provides leadership mentoring, tutoring, spiritual direction and supervision.

**Margie Upson** and husband Roger enjoy living in Otaki, Kapiti Coast on a small farmlet named 'Shalom'. From there she offers three strands of practice – spiritual direction, counselling and debriefing for mission personnel. Currently, much joy is found in being connected with their eight grandchildren here and overseas.

**Megan Blakie** is a nature lover who lived on a boat for 2 years in the South Pacific. She enjoys creative pursuits and is a professional wordsmith. She thinks she's an enneagram 4, which could help explain her creative moods. Input, intellection and ideation are some of her top 5 CliftonStrengths, so being offered a book review was a no-brainer.

**Leanne Munro** loves visits from God's messengers – karearea, kereru, kaka and raucous tuis. She's a PCANZ minister with a background in paediatric nursing. Lives in Wadestown with husband and 'emerging adult' daughter and is currently Chaplain at Enliven Huntleigh Rest Home in Wellington. Life influences include a year working at Turakina Maori Girls College (through the Order of St Stephen, 1986) and time at Iona Abbey as a volunteer in 1991.

