

Contemplative Fire Post

March 2019 – no.34

Retreat Weekend, Holland House
22nd – 24th February
Led by Susan Fogarty and John McEllhenney

Saturday's Silence

*"Within listening distance of the silence
we call God"*

Saturday's Silence, silence kept literally for the whole day and nights either side, allows us to dwell deep in the theme of silence, inspired by the poems of R S Thomas: *"But the silence in the mind is when we live best"*. The theme of silence runs throughout his poetry; we listened to music inspired by his words; looked at the art of his wife Elsi Eldridge which 'speaks to us' in silence; walked in the natural world, which *"looks at us in silence and tells all"*.



R. S. Thomas, "But the silence in the mind . . ."

Theme poem for the weekend

But the silence in the mind
is when we live best, within
listening distance of the silence
we call God. This is the deep
calling to deep of the psalm-
writer, the bottomless ocean
we launch the armada of
our thoughts on, never arriving.

It is a presence, then,
whose margins are our margins;
that calls us out over our
own fathoms. What to do
but draw a little nearer to
such ubiquity by remaining still?
(*Counterpoint* [1990], 50)



Psalm 42:7 – "Deep calls to deep at the thunder
of your cataracts; all your waves and your
billows have gone over me."

R. S. Thomas, "The View from the Window"

Like a painting it is set before one,
But less brittle, ageless; these colours
Are renewed daily with variations
Of light and distance that no painter
Achieves or suggests. Then there is movement,
Change, as slowly the cloud bruises
Are healed by sunlight, or snow caps
A black mood; but gold at evening
To cheer the heart. All through history
The great brush has not rested,
Nor the paint dried; yet what eye,
Looking coolly, or, as we now,
Through the tears' lenses, ever saw
This work and it was not finished?

(*Poetry for Supper* [1958], 27)



Praying in Christ – Jim Cotter – Body Prayer

Life-giver Start with hands together in prayer posture move them forward with

Pain-bearer Open arms to cruciform

Love-maker Enfolding arms

Source of all that is and shall be, arms open to ground – “the ground of our being”

Father & Mother of us all, circle arms up reaching up child-like vulnerable

Loving God, in whom is heaven. Hold the position.

The hallowing of your name Opening arms slowly

echo through the universe. Arms above the horizontal swinging side to side

The way of your justice Arms horizontal cruciform

be followed by the peoples of the world. Arms downward turn the body to draw in others

Your heavenly will gathering in the earth and the people

be done by all created beings. Arms extended circle in front of the abdomen

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom circle of life linking fingers

sustain our hope and come on earth. Hold and embrace the planet as if a ball.

With the bread we need for today, open the hands, turning elbows down

feed us. Begging hands forward at chest height

In the hurts we absorb from one another, Bring in the hurts in the hands

forgive us. Cross hands on chest and bow head

In times of temptation and test, clench fists

strengthen us. Open forearms to vertical power position

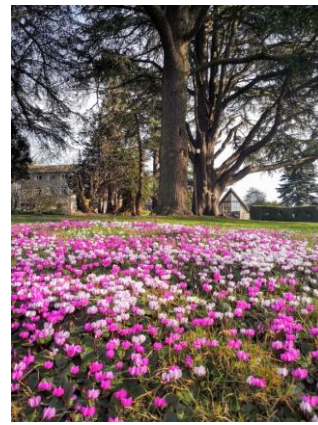
From trials too severe to endure, unclench fists and move arms out

spare us. Hold in cruciform

From the grip of all that is evil, let hands drop to half way shoulders drop

free us. exhale - drop head back

For you reign, in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever, Amen. Move arms up slowly until one hand covers the other over the heart. Remain still.



Reflections

“I found this retreat very enabling and deepening - a very rich silence. ..The retreat was well-balanced, well delivered, and Susan and John brought a solid and unobtrusive depth to the theme of silent communion with God.”

“I was inspired to spend time in the conference room drawing. Thank you so much for that inspiring exhibition of Elsi’s painting. I was particularly enlightened about the whole nature of silence – how it relates to MYSTERY and how silence and mystery combine to give us a sense of Presence. And this brings comfort. I feel “held” in the silence.”

“On a silent retreat, how apt that we explored evocations of silence in the poetry of R S Thomas. John showed us how Thomas evokes silence and ideas of silence, as much through the form of the poem as through the words themselves. He gave us moving meditations on silence: the earth turning imperceptibly in silence; the colours of the Creation are reflected back to us in silence; the heavenly bodies shine in silence; dark is silent. I ponder on the paradox of a poet who knows that “God’s first language is silence”.



Chilterns Contemplative Fire Group



Ann Worrall writes:

On Sunday January 13th, we held a meeting in Wendover of all people who were interested in helping sustain and develop Contemplative Fire in the area. This was an invited list of Companions and Friends who had previously shared in leading our times together or shown an interest over 2018.

This was our first planning meeting for the combined 'Wycombe' and 'Wendover' group. Of course we don't all come from Wycombe or Wendover, but those names have evolved. We felt it was a time to rename ourselves as one, and decided that the Chilterns Contemplative Fire group would be a good regional name, which others might actually recognise better than either Wycombe or Wendover. So one new group is formed. It feels good.

Fifteen of us attended the meeting, which we began with ten minutes silence, gathered in a candle lit circle in the ancient church of St Mary's in Wendover. We know that CF needs to start growing again. I love Contemplative Fire, but I know that just because I've found this and it means a lot to me, it doesn't necessarily mean anything to anyone else. It has to be made right for someone else too so it can be used in the world and isn't just a nice idea. So we were alert for how we could do this.

We rarely get the chance to see how each of us sustains ourselves in our Rhythm of Life, so we shared our ways of finding contemplative space. This was really interesting and energising. We found we had only one active Way Beyond Religion group meeting, one Open Circle, and a few Threes. These were from the original pilot that Philip started all those years ago. No new ones have sprung up, but the originals have deepened and developed.

Alongside these we had a Quiet Space being held twice a month with a poem, music, scripture then silence - very simple. Another Companion made use of the Quiet Garden monthly. Three people from different geographical areas around St Albans have begun meeting in the Cathedral to sit together in silence for an hour, then have coffee afterwards. Silence together is much appreciated and actually so simple. In addition there have been Woodland walks arranged four times a year.

What was very important to many gathered in the circle was the fact that the Chilterns Group has a monthly time together in a Still Waters, Gathering or Pilgrimage. Many of us have no other church. In addition these events are an opportunity to invite someone else to 'taste and see'. To that end, at this annual meeting, we filled the diary on the second Sunday of the month for the year ahead, with two Companions volunteering to take on the planning and leadership of each monthly event. We use the lectionary readings as a base for the Gatherings and a theme for Still Waters. We now have 2019 covered, with no one person bearing a heavy load but a real sharing of skills. One difficulty we can have in holding more Gatherings is the shortage of celebrants. Sharon is wonderful and very dedicated, but she has other responsibilities too. We'd love to attract a couple more who would be able to share these special occasions with us once or twice a year.

Fourteen of us are part of this leadership group in 2019, so we only need concern ourselves for our particular months. Every time is different - it feels very special.

We considered what we might feel able to initiate as extra events to attract others to try Contemplative Fire. Perhaps a new pilot scheme where the core CF events might be shared? A pilgrimage has been put into the calendar in the summer. Another 'Art in the Ark' is mooted, exploring Lenten themes through image. There is an upper room in St Mary's - could that be utilised for showing the efficacy of Threes or Sevens?

It feels good to talk together and to sit together in silent communion. We agreed that we would see what we could do to develop the growth of Contemplative Fire, meeting up with each other more regularly. The website and the forum were emphasised as the best place to find out what is going on and the Chilterns Group were

encouraged to go there and try it out. But we also know that we need to communicate locally better. We are creating some flyers for people to hand out locally, showing the dates for the year ahead and also to attach when we send out our monthly invitations.

A beautiful blessing from Jan Richardson rounded off our evening. Thanks to all.

- Singing The Beatitudes – 11th Feb
- Icon Visiting – 11th to 25th March – All Saints Church
- Woodland Gathering – Sunday 17th March – Downley Common
- Easter Gathering – Sunday 21st April – A New Order – St Mary's

Susan Whitfield writes:

“The Chiltern CF Still Waters this month – Singing The Beatitudes - was beautifully led by Margaret and Anne-Marie. They invited us to join them in chanting several of the Beatitudes in Aramaic and linked the experience to that of breathing and Body Prayer. This was my first encounter of singing in the language Jesus would have spoken and I found it very moving. They had also set up a helpful visual focus in the centre of our circle: golden cloth, candles and several spirals of bamboo and candlesticks. I'm hoping someone might have taken a photograph of it to share.

Anne-Marie also spoke about how it had occurred to her that singing was like Jacob's ladder – growing up from the earth to link to the angels in heaven. The sheets we were given also had some really thought provoking transliterations of the Beatitudes which helped me see these very familiar sayings in fresh ways. Thank you Margaret and Anne-Marie.”

Almost A Conversation by Mary Oliver

Sharon Roberts writes:

Responding to Jeremy's invitation to share a favourite Mary Oliver poem in a future edition, I offer one of mine, "Almost a Conversation". It means a lot to me, not least because while I was a volunteer chaplain on Iona last summer, and with "soft gaze" I was seeking out fragments of sea glass in the fine white sand below The Bishop's House, I glanced up in time

to see just yards away the unmistakable outline of an otter dashing across the rocks before disappearing into the sea. I stood wide-eyed and open-mouthed with delight, as a child might! Would that I could live always with that same sense of wonder, which Jeremy captured so well when he quoted Mary Oliver's words "When it is over, I want to say all my life I was a bride, married to amazement".

Almost a conversation

I have not really, not yet, talked with otter about his life.

He has so many teeth, he has trouble with vowels.

Wherefore our understanding is all body expression –

he swims like the sleekest fish,
he dives and exhales and lifts a train of bubbles.
Little by little he trusts my eyes
and my curious body sitting on the shore.

Sometimes he comes close.

I admire his whiskers
and his dark fur which I would rather die than wear.

He has no words, still what he tells about his life is clear.

He does not own a computer.

He imagines the river will last forever.

He does not envy the dry house I live in.

He does not wonder who or what it is that I worship.

He wonders, morning after morning, that the river

is so cold and fresh and alive, and still

I don't jump in.



A Silent Eucharist
14th March, Whirlow Chapel, Sheffield
Led by Di Williams and Gudrun Myers



The backdrop for this service was the Temenos exhibition in the chapel:

“During Lent, Whirlow has been hosting an exhibition of ten paintings and poems by local artist Ric Stott and poet Ian Adams. The works explore the idea of threshold space - a sacred place where new things come into being. The word Temenos means a piece of land marked off, either for a King, Queen or Ruler or marked and put aside for God. Adams and Stott discuss the concepts of holy ground in a beautiful and unique way in this exhibition.”

Call to worship: *O Nata Lux de Lumine*

An invitation to take time to:

- Lay down what we need to carry no longer
- Ponder the Word of God
- To pray beyond the threshold
- Reflect on the Bread of Life
- Consider the exhibition of art and poetry
- Music and Reflective Prayer



“I picked up 3 stones to represent what I was told was my intolerance, my arrogance and my impatience. I held them then lay them on the outstretched hand, prayed, then washed my hands in the water...”

Communion Prayer

The Bread is **Taken and Blessed**. It is passed round, allowing time to reflect on the birth, life and teaching of Jesus.

The Bread is **Broken and Given**. As the bread is passed round a second time, we take a piece and treasure it. It is his gift to you.

The wine is **Poured, Blessed** and passed round. We dip the bread or drink from the cup. Reflect on his crucified life poured out for you and on his risen life lived for you.

Ending

We are given a candle which we light for one another and take time to accept the challenge that God offers as we leave this place.

LENT AND ADVENT RESOURCES

“Spiritual food for deep journeying during these special times of attentiveness and preparation has been offered by a wide variety of Companions since the early days of Contemplative Fire.

These reflections and catalysts have blessed many of us. There is a special sense of community as we explore them each week, wherever we are, knowing that other Companions are praying and reflecting with the same shared offerings.

Taking the form of a weekly e-mail to all in the Community, they invite journeying alongside in a particularly creative and personal way and become a rich blessing both to the Companions who offer them and the rest of us who have opportunity to engage with them as we move towards the God-giveness of Christmas and Easter.

Most of us will know how creative, varied and deeply prayed over these offerings are. Those who have prepared them in the past also know what a blessing there is in that prayerful preparation time as we sit in spaciousness with God and they “come to birth.” Often the Sunday readings that are set for that year reveal a theme or direction of exploration. Sometimes a different approach emerges as a framework.

We are a skilled and deeply prayerful community with many spiritual insights. Most of us would be able to create such resources for our fellow Companions.

So here is an invitation. Please would you consider being willing to prepare an offering for a future Advent or Lent, in 2019/2020 or beyond? Usually two Companions would come together to do this. You could think about whom you resonate with and approach a fellow Companion to ask if they would be willing to do this with you. And there is a guidance sheet to get you started.

Support is on hand if required but the treasure of these resources is that they are personal to us, set, of course, within the general framework and ethos of Contemplative Fire. Please do prayerfully dwell on the possibilities of offering your gifting in this way, and be in touch if you are able to explore further."

Thank you,

The Trustees – Francoise, Jeremy, Hilary, Caroline, Jack, Ann, Sharon, Helen, Peter

Across the Threshold

Philip Roderick writes:



I thought you might be interested in this 2 min video made a week or so ago with some of our Dance for Parkinson's group in Brighton. This will be shown with others at the PD international symposium in Japan this June. The Japanese context led us and other dance groups to be attentive to the movements and energy of the red-crowned crane, a symbol of health and healing in Japan. Careful listeners will remember the Hang music and chant from Track 4 of my "Sheer Sound" CD!

The link is: <https://youtu.be/wfujC59CeMk>

New constitution now registered

Jack McBane, Trustee, writes:

Contemplative Fire has successfully amended its constitution and registered these changes with Companies House and the Charity Commission. This means that we have now changed the wording that describes what we believe and what we do as an organisation and also all Companions are now full members of the Trust. This allows all our Companions to vote at the AGM (Community Weekend) on the election of trustees, the accounts and the annual budget.

At the community weekend held at Feldon Lodge in September 2015, it was decided we needed to review the basic aspects of CF, including the structure, functions and operation of the Trust. A Companions Review Group was established and it reported its recommendations to a community wide meeting held at Boxmoor in March 2016. The recommendations were discussed and agreed, particularly, to change the descriptions of what CF stands for and to find a way to make all Companions full members of the Trust, with full voting rights.

This work eventually took some two years to complete, due to delays in the Government empowering these changes and in the negotiations with the statutory bodies. In December of last year, our solicitor finally received the approval to all the changes we had agreed on.

Although it has taken some time to achieve this, we are now a stronger organisation operating in an environment of transparency and inclusion.

Welcome to Contemplative Fire

A very warm welcome to new Companion Kirsty Turner from Belper, Derbyshire, and new Friend Alison Mactier from Aylesbury. Jane McBane from Sheffield is now a Friend.



Seeing a Luminous World

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; . . .*
—Gerard Manley Hopkins [1]

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin often used the image of fire for God. As with Moses' experience of the burning bush, the fire invites our reverent attention; it burns without consuming. Teilhard wrote:

. . . the World gradually caught fire for me, burst into flames; how this happened all *during* my life, and *as a result of* my whole life, until it formed a great luminous mass, lit from within, that surrounded me. . . . Christ. His Heart. A Fire: a fire with the power to penetrate all things—and which was now gradually spreading unchecked. [2]

Louis Savary suggests a simple practice to help us see the luminous divine everywhere: "Teilhard encourages us to learn this new way of seeing and promises that as we deeply explore our world with it, we will begin to see how God has "invaded" and "ignited" the universe with a consuming, loving fire. He wants us to be able to see, ultimately, the entire universe as the shining Body of Christ.

God is waiting for you, Teilhard says, to discover the diaphanous divine beauty, not only in the spectacular loveliness of creation on earth or in its ever-expanding vastness in outer space, but also in your daily personal and interpersonal experience. We learn to develop these new eyes, the same way we learn any art, by ongoing practice. Here is a basic spiritual practice of Teilhardian spirituality. . . .

In order to discover and frequently exercise your new eyes to discern the fire or luminosity within things, start small. Choose one living thing, such as a flower, a bug, a pet, or a baby, and with your imagination picture a kind of glow or luminousness surrounding and penetrating the object of your contemplation. Stay with it for a few minutes, focusing not on the external beauty or complexity of the object, but upon the glow surrounding and penetrating it, as if that were its source of life and existence.

Once you learn to do this, the glow or luminosity will develop a life of its own. Then you can move on to another object of contemplation to witness its glowing luminosity. From time to time, say a word of thanks to this benevolent God who is constantly revealing God's self to you everywhere in

creation.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th edition, eds. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford University Press: 1967), 66.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*, trans. René Hague (Harcourt Brace & Company: 1980, ©1978), 15, 47

—Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin—The Divine Milieu Explained: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Paulist Press: 2007), 14-15.

Taken from Fr Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations



"Parables" by Sapphira Olson: a review

Helen Fitch-Hunter writes:

I seriously enjoyed reading these parables - 16 little theological stories. Within the collection there is plenty to immerse oneself in and mull over. The atmosphere created by the black and white illustrations to each one is wonderful too, reflecting my friend's background in science fiction and graphic novels. The parables are at times full of simple beauty and magic, with characters including Morning Wolf and the Starchild, and glimpses of owls and eagles. These allegories follow such threads as the separation of lovers, the strength of women, the acceptance of all gender types. You will find Cerberus having a crisis of job satisfaction and Dionysus drinking wine with Jesus under the olive trees. The parables are also at times uncomfortable, and that's brilliant, because it is also what Jesus did.

Extract from *The Parable of the Nightingale*:

"I have tried a thousand times to break free and each time I fail and I am dragged back into the underworld."

"Your song is mute, like the female nightingale," says God. "Only the male vocal organs of the nightingale can sing out for the female to come forth."

The woman spins open the taps over the sink and cups water into her hands. Beaded bubbles pass through her fingers. In the mirror her reflection moves closer to the glass and mouths, *set me free*.

"I feel so foolish," says the woman. "Like a teenage girl scribbling notes in a diary that I will never dare show anyone. I don't know what to do anymore. I'm fed up with this body."

"Your world is being turned upside down," says God. "What was held below, will come into the light, despite what Hades has said."

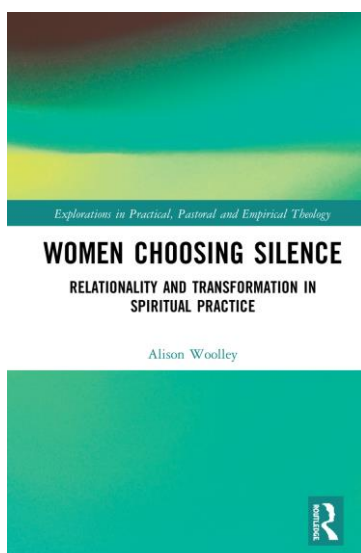
"You will help me?" says the woman after a pause. "I will," says God. "It is your time to be born again. Sing with me."

The woman opens her mouth and lets the song of her heart burst forth. The whole world flows into the bathroom and she feels her feet lift from the stone floor.

Helen is a friend of the author who has written under this pen name.

"Parables" is available as an eBook for £2.99. The paperback version is published by Elsewhen Press on April 22nd.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Parables-Sapphira-Olson-ebook/dp/B07N957HWG>



Women Choosing Silence Relationality and Transformation in Spiritual Practice

Alison Woolley

Series: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology

This book investigates chosen practices of silence in the lives of a cohort of Christian

women today, evidencing its potential for enabling profound relationality and empowerment within their spiritual journeys. Its substantive theological and empirical exploration of women's practices of silence demonstrates that, for some, silence-based prayer is valued as a place of encounter and transformation in their relationships with God, with themselves and with others. Utilising a methodology that proposes focusing on silence throughout the qualitative research process, this study also presents a new model for depicting relational change.

Dr Alison Woolley, PhD - Director, Seeds of Silence
seedsofsilence.org.uk



Living Spirituality Connections events are taking place in Brighton, Birmingham, London and Winchester over the coming months.

From 29 May to 2 June there are two rare opportunities to attend lectures by **Professor John Haught**, Distinguished Research Professor from Georgetown University, in Winchester and London.

On **29 May** LSC is visiting the University of Winchester for Professor Haught's lecture **Our Awakening Universe: The New Cosmic Story and the Meaning of Faith**. We are also offering a historic tour of Winchester and a visit to the University's Cosmic Walk prior to the lecture. All are free of charge.

On Sunday **2 June** at 1.50pm Professor Haught is giving a talk for Eco Church and LSC at St James's Church Piccadilly on **Christian Faith and Ecology in an Unfinished Universe**. Free.

For booking details and further information see <http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/events/>

On Saturday **8 June**, in partnership with Earth Church Brighthelm and Spirit of Peace, LSC is running an important day on our theme for the year: **Human Flourishing on a Flourishing Earth. Finding a way together**. Keynote speaker: award-winning environmentalist and solutionist **Nicola Peel**. The workshops cover both practical and spiritual topics. The venue is a short walk from Brighton station.
http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/events_april_june19.pdf