

## Contemplative Fire Post

June 2019 – no.36

Pilgrimage to Now/here, Stroud, 27 April



*Francoise Pinteaux-Jones writes:*

It was my privilege to host this session at my house in Stroud, when it was a joy to have for the first time the company of Barbara Abraham, a Canadian Companion who has moved to Bath some months ago, as well as being joined by Helen Beale. With Jo and Rachel (but sadly missing Jane) as the regular nucleus of togetherness, we set off exploring what Saint George meant for us and who or what were our dragons.

All that is known for certain of Saint George is that he was a Roman soldier martyred in Palestine during a Late Empire Christian persecution. The fact that he is mostly known to us as a knight slaughtering a dragon shows what a protean figure he is. An echo of classical myth (e.g. Perseus and Andromeda) the imperial officer winds up in medieval romance, rescuing a princess in the best chivalric tradition; in Islamic sources, Jirjis, martyred in Palestine is thereafter repeatedly restored to life.

He was embraced as a patron by the crusaders and figures in the frescoes of many a Crusader church, but is also the Green Knight of the Round Table cycle and the ever-reborn Green Man known in the Middle-East as Al Khidr.

In the village of El-Khadr near Bethlehem, a Greek Orthodox Church was erected in his honour as the patron saint of Palestine; to this day he is revered there by Christians and Muslims alike.



*St George in the Crusader Church of Mar Tadros, Lebanon*

Together, we named some of today's 'dragons':

- In the shadow of St George, Palestinian suffering
- The fear and loathing of such acts as the Sri Lanka bombings
- The inability to hear out the Other in the murder of Lyra McKee or the Brexit polarisation
- The neglect of community stigmatised in two UN reports
- Our disconnect with our environment now crystallised around plastic.....

Looking back, Rachel's take on the dragon not as a foe to exterminate but as a being to acknowledge, as a captive to release, offers the beginning of an answer to the ills of our age: we cannot suppress them but perhaps we can tame them.

After this, we walked in silence in the grounds of Hawkwood College, stopping at the pagoda (pictured above) to read Psalm 116, in which could be heard echoes of our "dragons":

I trusted in the Lord when I said,

"I am greatly afflicted";

in my alarm I said,

"Everyone is a liar."

Then back to my house for soup, a rich variety of home-made breads, cheeses, salads and fruits: another way to discover each other before returning to our separate, so diverse and so mutually enriching journeys.

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Pilgrimage to Now/here, Saltmarshe,  
27 April



“.....and I think to myself, what a wonderful world” Louis Armstrong

Jeremy Timm led the Pilgrimage. Music and song have often been associated with creation. On our silent pilgrimage walk we enjoyed various stops along the way, when we had the opportunity to breathe deeply, take in the glories of the natural world, listen to pieces of music and meditations by Thomas Berry. The music was varied in character, some pieces known, and others not, all helping us to be grounded in the springtime moment, and to experience the Divine in the creation enveloping us.

-*Sempre, Alessandra Paonessa - from the album, Remembering Heaven.*

-*What a Wonderful World - Louis Armstrong*

-*Dance of the Clouds Pt 1 - Origen, from the album, Two Steps from Heaven.*

-*A Wild Beauty - Rhonda Mackert, Album, A Wild Beauty, Solo Piano*

“The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To become alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence.”

“I do not mind a heaven father, that is all right. But I do like the idea of an earth mother, and I also like to talk to the trees. This idea that the trees talk to me and I talk to the trees, this kind of subjectivity, is somehow absent from our tradition.”

“Without the soaring birds, the great forests, the sounds and colouration of the insects, the

free-flowing streams, the flowering fields, the sight of the clouds by day and the stars at night, we become impoverished in all that makes us human.”

“There is an awe and reverence due to the stars in the heavens, the sun, and all heavenly bodies; to the seas and the continents; to all living forms of trees and flowers; to the myriad expressions of life in the sea; to the animals of the forests and the birds of the air. To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice.”

“There is no such thing as “human community” without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all living forms. Humans are woven into this larger community. The large community is the sacred community.”

*From “Meditations with Thomas Berry, 2010”*



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### Meeting of Trustees – 13<sup>th</sup> April

*Francoise Pinteaux-Jones, Chair, writes:*

On 13 April the Trustees were Peter and Charlotte’s guests at Questers, their home. The kindness and generosity of their hospitality and the comforts of the Ark contributed in no small way to the dispatching of a vast interlocking sprawl of business.

Dispersed, our community breathes through its events. Early proposals and planning for the Community Weekend were set in train to address current developments around membership.

Themes and leaders for Wisdom on the Way days were explored in the light of the desired outcomes of Contemplative Fire’s renewed presence at Greenbelt spear-headed by Helen, Ali and Caroline. Preparations for this campaign were given careful attention, addressing

practicalities on site, materials and equipment, and personnel with an open invitation to Companions to attend and support our outreach.

The Trustees also confirmed the booking of venues for next year's residential events: the Fellowship Weekend, February Silent Retreat, Community Retreat and Community Weekend.

Essential to our Community is its interconnectedness, which relies on the execution of a number of diverse tasks, many of them unspectacular, but no less important to its good running and flourishing. Such is our communication with and representation to Acknowledged Communities. Initiated by Philip and endorsed by all Companions, the maintenance of contact fell to Diane upon his retirement and we asked her to continue as our representative on this body.

Another example is the implementation and oversight of safeguarding that Peter has taken in hand and pursued, placing us under the authority of Birmingham (Bishop Ann's) Diocese. It is to be hoped that the required level of training to be achieved by all trustees will have been met by next meeting, which will enable us to allow the unfolding of long-awaited projects that necessitate it.

Much now happens in our separate regions, which the Trustees report on at each meeting to orient further developments. Still with growth in mind, this is another instance of the need for a willing Companion in each region to be the first point of contact for interested persons in their sector. Hilary has drafted a checklist of what the role entails, to be approved by the Trustees and issued to those prepared to contribute in this role.

Under pressure of time, the fulfilment of other roles, notably pastoral, were recorded for later and full discussion.

With the desire to nurture and grow our Community comes the necessity for clarity regarding what membership entails and how it is achieved. On the basis of a draft she offered for discussion, Sharon is to finalise a document defining membership categories and expectations for both Companions and Friends. This has implications for our Accompaniment and Induction approach, to be given our full attention at our next meeting. With our outreach projects as well as the spiritual care of our members, we are also looking into the ways people have come to the decision to become

Friends. A propos of which the Trustees were invited to clarify once again that the status of Friend, being a subscription membership, precludes access to contact information under our data protection policy.

The enrichment of the Community also necessitates new materials and a better dissemination of existing resources. Hilary is working on membership forms and templates and with the permission of Susan Blagden and Tessa Holland, the Rhythm of Life books will get a new print run.

Both our dispersion and our vocation at the edge demand precise, consistent and up to date communication. A new leaflet has been produced and the Community Guide has been refreshed, after much crosschecking to maintain its core message intact. With the same concern to uphold the processes that are at the heart of our common practice, Sharon has been reviewing and revising a number of process documents (guides to running an Open Circle, Way Beyond Religion etc). They will be made available in the Members Only section of the website in pdf formats designed to ensure consistency is maintained.

A large amount of material is being collected or is indeed ready to be fed into our website. Alas, its deployment is very slow due to the lack of time the designer is allocating to the project. Relentlessly and steadfastly pursued by Ann, Hilary, Helen and Tina (who met prior to the full meeting to update its progress) it is slowly falling into place and will in (over)due course deliver more archive and fresh material. Notably, it will facilitate more direct contact and exchanges with our Canadian Companions.

Readers who have got this far will have figured that a number of our activities do not come free and the financial year presentation of accounts offered the opportunity to assess the cost-benefit of our initiatives and how to pursue them. Having set a budget last year, the reading of our figures made more sense and was more helpful in making decisions for next year. Sally's expertise and skills in explaining and highlighting significant data were an invaluable contribution towards the way money is being allocated. There will, of course, be an opportunity to discuss this at our AGM during the Community Weekend.

One thing is clear: none of what we do would be possible without Companions' regular giving. The Community lives on their generosity, and the discreet work of so many Companions –

speakers at and organisers of events, the Greenbelt gang, coordinators, hosts, writers, editors: this immense sharing of gifts, for which I cannot express enough gratitude, binds our Community, pouring out, receiving and passing on in the trefoil's endless flow.

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## April - CF Lincs In The City: Earth Day... Trees, Birds, Bees & Me.

*Melanie Carroll writes:*

CFLincs in the City is a local expression of the Contemplative Fire ethos. We meet at the spiritual space that is St Mary le Wigford in Lincoln on a monthly basis. Our April session was a contemplation in preparation for Earth Day, on how interconnected we are with all other creatures and species of the earth, sea and air.

We began with Joyce Rupp's Consideration called 'What have we done to them' from 'Prayers of Boundless Compassion':

It begins with:

*'Shoot them. Swat them.*

*Stomp on them. Kill them.*

*Steal their food. Beat them....'*

And ends with;

*'St Francis of Assisi called each one a 'brother' or a 'sister'.*

*What have we done to our family?'*

We then took some minutes silence to contemplate and dwell with those words before moving onto the following:

'Without worms our soil dies, our flowers do not bloom, the dead roses do not become compost without the action of worms and insects and microbes in the soil...

Without the bees and birds and butterflies to pollinate our trees and flowers and crops we have no bread, no apples, no food let alone the sweet medicinal honey...

Without me doing my bit these losses are impossible to change, without me doing my bit, paying attention, and caring enough to change then I am responsible for my fellow brethrens' (human and non-human) pain and loss... Is this the path that the Christ chose for me?'

People were then invited to move amongst the Contemplation Stations or Creativity Table as they wanted, or to just sit - as they felt led.

We had a tree-shaped labyrinth that could be walked with small packets of easy to grow seeds that are attractive to bee and butterflies, to take with them. Alternatively they were invited to take a walk outside around the church which is very much an urban area with just a very small bit of green to the side of it, and some large old trees just outside it.

The words for this station asked us to focus on stewardship and how we walk the earth.

*'Walking and seeing the earth:*

*Mind in a thousand directions like planes overhead, attention fleeting as I look without seeing, but now today let me see the beautiful path I walk...*

*And with each step awareness of the climate, and with each step awareness of the cost to nature, caring for what is and removing what should not be. '*

There was a station with honey and biscuit bread to taste, asking us to consider agriculture issues, plenty and lack, and how we are dependent on nature and other species too.

*'This Food:*

*In this collection of food is the summation of the universe. The sustenance of all life depends on me; I depend on all life to support my existence. May I better appreciate foods' journey and be active to not waste such bounty others lack.'*

Our third station had a collection of rubbish and plastics (largely single use) to consider... 'Coffee cup, carrier bag, twine, waste, rubbish. Yet roses bloom and die becoming garden

refuse, garden refuse becomes compost and roses bloom; all things are capable of transformation - even plastic can be reused if



Contemplative Fire Lincs in the City  
Trees, Birds, Bees, & Me - Earth Day.

we care enough not to just dispose without care.' When we returned as a group after an hour and a quarter, we again used one of Joyce Rupp's prayers, 'We Do Not Own The Land And Seas':

*'Creator of beauty and abundance,  
Our planet earth is your sacred temple,  
A circling blue and green orb of splendour,  
A splash of colour in the milky way galaxy.*

*The wonder of the spacious heavens has been  
carved into sections and segments, divided by  
humans' insistent domination.  
They have failed to understand and accept that  
the land and the waters belong to you,  
A gift to all humans and nonhumans -  
Never to be fought over, bartered and bought.*

*My lawn, my beach, my country, my minerals,  
my forests, my mountains.  
When did the illusion of 'my' overtake the  
eternal truth that all of Earth is yours?*

*Giver of all good, benevolent being,  
Teach us to return what is falsely owned, to let  
go of our territorial persistence;  
Awaken us to share what you have gifted:  
A temporary home, a lovely place on loan.*

*Guide and direct us to change our views.  
May we have the courage to finally set free  
What we humans have wrongfully claimed as  
belonging to ourselves. '*

And this led us into a further beautiful session of reflection, contemplation and conversation that ranged wide and deep after the silence and

engagement with the stations. One of the participants shared with us a prayer letter they had written at the creativity station, which they intended to send on to their diocesan newsletter asking that the churches do more to work with and protect the biodiversity of life, especially in their areas and church yards - perhaps beehives or orchard trees were suggested. Another participant shared about a website called 'treehugger' and how even those without the capacity for roof solar panels can use solar panels on small scale and windowsills to charge mobile phones and small appliances to make a contribution to helping with climate change issues, and a further discussion was of course being mindful of how we garden in our own small spaces - natural not chemical, and also what choices we can make that would help other species such as palm oil avoidance etc. This was an incredible discussion that really moved us through the threefold aspect that is at the heart of Contemplative Fire... being, knowing and doing. We really did move through quiet contemplative practice, into the engagement of creative practice, and finally truly leaving with real compassionate practices in place for us to act on in our daily lives. A truly blessed session (but then they usually very much are I find!)

[www.facebook.com/CFLincsinthecity](http://www.facebook.com/CFLincsinthecity)



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# Open Heart! Open Mind!

Have you ever experienced a shift within yourself? It might be around what I'd call your heart space, or it could be within your mind. I think I first became aware of it within my mind. I grew up with a clear sense of right and wrong. Then as a young Christian I was in a very strong doctrinal community where absolute truths were taught, so I developed a clear sense of correct beliefs. If I heard a 'new' idea, I quickly, both intuitively and intellectually, ran it through my grid of acceptable beliefs. If it didn't fit, and many didn't, out it went. I couldn't tolerate anything internally that would unsettle me.

Over the years my heart space has become much larger and much deeper. I spent years growing a contemplative pattern into my life. As I did that, I encountered the Love (with a capital 'L') of God. I became aware of how present God is around me and within me. My sense of myself, not only at peace with God, but as Jesus describes in John's Gospel, one with God, became deeply real to me. As that happened, the roots of my heart space went deep into the Love of Christ. I became more secure within God's Love and then more secure hearing many different ideas.

Now I'm often aware of internal movements – my heart opens, my heart closes. My mind opens, my mind closes. I've watched how I've changed in my reaction to ideas. I can see how I can be open to new ideas or closed to them. The voice within me used to be very strong. "NO – that's not what I think." I would pull away, not even able to entertain that thought. It was outside my comfort zone. It's beyond what I'd been taught as 'true' or 'good' or 'healthy' or 'honest.' But now my response is more "That's interesting. Does it bring peace, joy, kindness, compassion, forgiveness into me, into the world?"

I began to be able to have open ears and to listen to different ideas. The filter that I ran them through changed dramatically. I was no longer needing every idea to fit into a

prescribed article of faith/belief. I could reflect on them and gather the impact of the idea on me and others around me. If I walk this way, will I come closer to others? If I encompass this belief will I be more gracious to other human beings? Slowly, my mind began to become open. Now I embrace living with an open mind. As the old song says, 'Don't Fence Me In'! For me, to begin to cultivate an open mind, I had to have an open heart. To develop an open heart, I had to allow my roots to go deeply, experientially, into the Love of Christ. I spent time in prayer, study, and spiritual conversations. It is why I love to offer people the contemplative pathway – learn to slow down, discover you're loved by God, and then live out of what you hear.

Open heart, open mind.

When do you experience your mind opening, closing, your heart opening, closing?

Love and prayers

Anne Crosthwait

Mystic in Motion, Canada

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## ***Quiet Garden Annual Day Sunday 23 June 2019***

We are a **global network** of gardens in a variety of settings, providing people of **all ages and backgrounds access** to outdoor spaces to experience silence, contemplation and prayer. **On Sunday 23 June 2019 we invite you to celebrate Quiet Gardens day, organise a fundraising event** to support our work, or arrange to **share a little about Quiet Gardens and the Movement with your church or community group.**

It is also a good opportunity to **hold Quiet Gardens and the Movement in prayer** on the day as you celebrate the mid-point in the seasonal calendar where you are. The [Quiet25 Prayer](#) and [Quiet Garden Prayer](#) can easily be used as part of a church service. **We hope you will be able to mark the day in some way.**

Explore all our news at  
[www.quietgarden.org/news](http://www.quietgarden.org/news)

Explore all our resources at  
[www.quietgarden.org/resources](http://www.quietgarden.org/resources)