

## Contemplative Fire Post

May 2016 – no.13

### Wisdom on the Way 14<sup>th</sup> May

**'Hanging in God': The Blessed Jan van Ruusbroec, Theologian of the Mystery (1293 – 1381)**



*See, the bridegroom is coming*

Companion Malcolm Peet led the day. He spoke about how Ruusbroec focussed mainly on looking inwards as the way to God, but he also said that God can be found by contemplating external nature. So, in the morning the focus was on looking inwards and in the afternoon on the contemplation of external nature.

Everything in creation ‘hangs in God’ just as we do. As Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, ‘we are not *in* the environment, we *are* the environment’.

Malcolm began with a poem attributed to Ruusbroec, “*The essence and prime source of all creatures*”:

O wild and perfect harmony  
of flowers along the water-way!

How glad I am to see you there  
stand in garb God bid you wear!

Born to simple purity,  
you stand where God willed you to be,

and there perform through sunlit hours  
your simple task – just being flowers!

Pure being thus I see in you  
and all you say to me is true;

and the joy which thrills through me  
is one with your simplicity.



you signal me a message true  
and show what I myself must do,

remembering the simple trust  
that, deep in all things, ever must

be hid the universal ground,  
the everlasting God unbound!

Malcolm gave an example from his own experience, one that was a long time ago but which has stayed with him. Whilst walking in the local woods, he saw a dead tree trunk that was rotting but which supported a whole variety of life, including mushrooms, moss and grasses. This led him to meditate on dying oneself to bring forth new life, the death and resurrection of Christ, and so forth. He said: “*Such things are often very personal – the right lesson at the right time. On the other hand, such enlightening experiences do not necessarily happen when we might want them to: it is not entirely under our control!*”



*Helen Fitch-Hunter writes:*

Malcolm Peet’s talk on Jan van Ruusbroec was a valuable introduction to this out-of-favour mystical theologian. The two sessions Malcolm presented revealed first Ruusbroec’s biography and his works relating to the problem of false mysticism, then he outlined Ruusbroec’s ideas of the ascent to mystical union.

*“This essential unity of spirit with God does not exist by itself, but abides in God and it flows forth*

*from God...And were the creature ever to part from God, it would fall into a pure nothingness."*

Malcolm focused on Ruusbroec's favourite picture of the Trinity as a whirlpool: "perfect rest and total activity". We can sink deep into the inner peace at the bottom of the whirlpool from the turbulent activity on the surface. It was suggested that this is a natural state for any human of any religion or none, a point of absolute simplicity but a helpful opening into the possibility of spiritual union.



Both sessions led to deeper discussions among the gathered Companions and visitors, particularly in the second talk where the variety of mystical metaphors for unity were a focus, including the unity of marriage, that of a river to the sea, or a sponge within the sea.

It was helpful, in trying to put images and words to mystical union, that Ruusbroec says in his work *Seven Enclosures* that the Father "*empties the memory of forms and images and raises up the denuded mind to its origin which is He himself. There man is established in and united to his beginning, which is God. Power and freedom are given him to work both outwardly and inwardly with all virtues.*"

We were left with an intriguing start to understanding the theology of this 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic so fond of contemplating in the woods and wandering in his valley.

(Brief bibliography available).

## Greetings from Reading

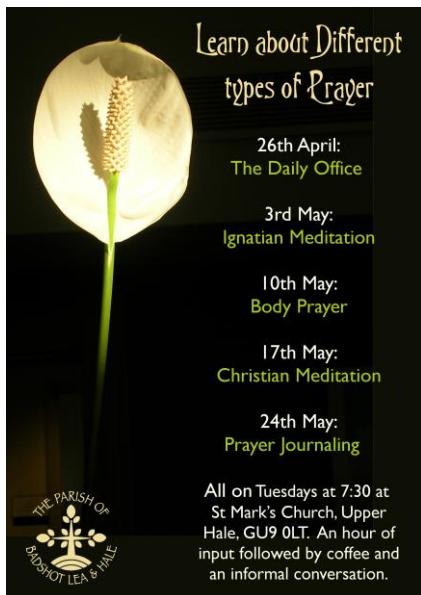
*Jenny Cuff writes:*

This is the scene on Still Waters day. We meet monthly in the garden room from 10.30 to 12 midday with a lectio divina style session. This month we read the blessing taken from the report of Philip and Jill's retirement party (see CF Post 12), which prompted us to reflect on all the blessings we have in our lives and we were thankful for the opportunity to deepen our friendship.



*From left: Shirley Barefield, Michael Weller, John Colquhoon, Geraldine Bridges, Angela Linton*

## Sharing our body prayer



Diane Rutter writes:

On 10<sup>th</sup> May I had the delightful experience of sharing a time of Body Prayer with 18 people in the Parish of Badshot Lea and Haley. Jo Howard helped me plan the evening, as she has led such experiential taste-and-see sessions for other church groups.

Rev Alan Crawley, Joint Rector, wrote:

*"Diane introduced Body Prayer to people who had not come across it before, as part of a series on different forms of prayer. She led us through it and helped us to experience it for ourselves in a thoughtful and reflective way. At the end of the evening some were very taken with it and have started using it themselves, and it has been introduced to an all-age congregation in the parish and been well received."*

<http://www.badshotleaandhale.org/>

I was able to give a handout on Body Prayer, and to refer to our website. One person had found our YouTube body prayer clips before coming and was planning to share the links with friends.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxWOfNqobNY>. Another person asked what it means to have a Rhythm of Life and how being a Companion in Contemplative Fire supports this. I found there was a delighted interest in experiencing body prayer, and this made me think that other Companions might consider crossing the threshold and offering this to others too.

## “Feeding the Flames in the Hearth”

### A Learning Day Together

Hearing, reading, sharing, discussing, exploring, making suggestions on how we encourage the next stage in developing  
**the spirit and ethos of Contemplative Fire**

**Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2016, 10am to 4pm**  
**The Boxmoor Trust, Hemel Hempstead**

With input from Tom Hinds, Soobie Whitfield and Sally Wright, drawing on a book\* (which you will NOT need to have read in advance!)

£15 for the Learning Day and refreshments (bring your own lunch) payable to Tom Hinds in advance, or on the day. Please apply in advance to Tom, 145 Maidenhead Rd, Windsor SL4 5EZ or 01735 858 123 (he's not into email!)

(\*The proposal from CF North which led to the setting up of the Companions' Review Group said: "The model of a "teal" organisation as set out in Frederic Laloux's book *Reinventing Organisations* is of real value in terms of on-the-ground organisation and could also be addressed by the Review Group". (in the Group's agenda, the book was a second-tier priority).



## Tasting Soul-life

*Canadian Companion Anne Crosthwait writes in her blog about a recent communal retreat:*

“Another discovery was of sweetness of the depth of silence within a community. My first retreat was solitary. My second was communal. I joined a ‘Courage to Lead Retreat’ based on the principles outlined in “Hidden Wholeness” by Parker Palmer. He described my yearnings to live from the depths of my being, rather than the clutter I often encounter. He calls it an undivided life.

As we gently moved through the retreat agenda, for we had gathered with a purpose, words spoken came from our souls. Sometimes we simply sat quietly together. From our early moments together I experienced a safe place for my soul to show up. From our readings, solitary reflections, times of small group listening, learning to ask open, honest questions of one another, a place safe enough for our wild and wonderful souls was created.

Sitting in the circle I experienced a group of people consistently for two days speaking from their souls, listening from their souls. A taste of soul-life. Made me hungry for more! A place safe enough for your soul to show up – what does that mean to you?”

Love and prayers, Anne  
Community Leader Canada



# Contemplative Fire Website

*Gill Greenwood writes:*

The updating of the current website is now being undertaken by the IT team at Voluntary Action Sheffield. Updates are needed for "Events", "Calendar", "Verbal & Visual Reflections & Snapshots", "Prayer Resources" and "Educational & Community Resources". For the time being, please send any updates to me to pass to VAS, but I would VERY MUCH APPRECIATE passing this task to an interested Companion! Thank you to Justin Roderick for all his work on the website.

*Is anyone interested in exploring a new website  
for our community?*

Wisdom on the Way

## ***“Walking with Hildegard of Bingen”***

with Susan Blagden

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July at Douai Abbey, Upper  
Woolhampton, Reading



The next Trustees meeting is on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June in Sparkhill, Birmingham. All Companions are welcome.

