

Contemplative Fire Post

December 2017 – no.27

Light Shines In The Darkness

Advent shadows to the end the waning of daylight and nature's slumber, while alerting us to the great light of new beginnings... And we have indeed walked through darkness in a world grown meaner, not least in the land where a promise of peace on earth was sealed by the birth in a stable of a Saviour: Immanuel, God with us...

There, Isaiah's captive are children, his oppressed made home and landless, their Jerusalem given over as the undivided capital of the Jewish State. It seems impossible to ignore the ominous pronouncements coming from Washington, many of which could or do set the planet on a disastrous course. It is disquieting to find our own country at odds with itself at a crossroad in its destiny, drifting away from an organisation which, for all its faults, has preserved peace. As violence can everywhere be expected to erupt, some among us would not shrink from the extrajudicial killing of the country's errant citizens.

... Is this "The year of the Lord's favour"?

Yet, at the bleakest hour, light shines in the darkness. Certainly, it was Etty Hillesum's expression of God: a young and free Jewish woman with no formal religious upbringing, she came, as Nazi malevolence grew more explicit everyday, to discover within herself the "deeper richer ground" where she could rest and which she named "God". She had the profound intuition that God took flesh wherever humanity was willing to receive Him: "when in our being we reject hatred, refuse anger, continue to forgive both ourselves and others, God is born again and present in our compassion." This God-with-us she took ever closer to the desperate humanity dispatched on the trains; her dialogue with God became more intense, her promise to help him into the world a daily reality.



Etty Hillesum (1914-1943) tells us that God's incarnation is not just for Christmas, it needs take flesh in each and every one of us every day of our life. It is present in every act of kindness, in every effort to comfort all who mourn, to bring righteousness to the earth.

Francoise Pinteaux Jones

Pilgrimage to Nowhere, Saltmarshe, 28 Oct Led by Jane & Jack McBane



Around the fire

"Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the realities and truths of existence...for yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision, but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope".
A Sanskrit proverb

Introduction: To be a Pilgrim

"To journey without being changed is to be a nomad. To change without journeying is to be a chameleon. To journey and be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim."

Mark Nepo, 'The Exquisite Risk', quoted in 'The Soul of a Pilgrim', Christine Valters Paintner, Sorin Books 2015

The words about the two traditions of Pilgrimage were taken directly from the Contemplative Fire website, in one of Gill's interviews with Philip Roderick, when she asked him to talk about the origins of the Pilgrimage to Now/here. See:

<https://contemplativefire.org/resources/media/>

Track 21, Philip Roderick & Gill Greenwood, Question 5: Pilgrimage to Now/here

"Enlightenment is always somehow to see and touch the Big Mystery, the Big Pattern, or the Big Picture. Jesus called it the Kingdom or Reign of God; Buddha called it enlightenment. Both Buddhists & Hindus speak of *nirvana*. Philosophers might call it Truth. Most of us just call it love.

There's no answer, no problem-solving, simply awareness. You cannot *not* live in the presence of God. You are totally surrounded by it. You cannot earn this God. You cannot prove yourself worthy of this God. Feeling God's presence is simply a matter of awareness, of fully allowing and enjoying the present moment."

Richard Rohr

On the river bank

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

"Avowal", Denise Levertov, in "The Stream & the Sapphire",
New Directions Book, 1997

I would love to live like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.

"Fluent", John O'Donohue (Conamara Blues)



The path between the fields

"When we walk like (we are rushing), we print anxiety and sorrow on the earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the earth. Be aware of the contact between your feet and the earth. Walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet."

Thích Nhất Hạnh

At the pond

Psalm 119

All you who would know the Blessed Way,
the path of highest human good upon the earth,
Come listen to the template of words of God,
and seek to follow with your whole heart and soul the truth of these instructions.
But listen well with all your heart and not your head alone,
and as you walk the path of God,
side-step every evil that you know.
You have set the pattern of this path before us,
God,
and we must learn to walk.
So may each footstep of our learning
be an exercise of care,
and our feet be firm upon the way
that knows no shame if we but learn to walk it.
My heart is open and I give thanks to you, O God
that I can be your pilgrim-student.
I seek to do your bidding, Lord,
You know I need you, forsake me not or leave me now.

*'Ancient Songs Sung Anew: the psalms as poetry',
translations by Lynn C. Bauman, Praxis 2000*

On the windy path between the pond and Jeremy's field

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.....

A hard time we had of it.....
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.....

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again,
but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen
birth and death,

But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Extracts from T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi" in 'Collected Poems, 1909-1962', Faber & Faber, 2002

In Jeremy's field

"And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so? I did. And what did you want? To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth."

Raymond Carver, "Late Fragment" in "A New Path to the Waterfall", Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989

Around the fire

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know it for the first time.....
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Extracts from T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding" in "T.S.Eliot, Collected Poems 1909-1962", Faber & Faber 2002



Wisdom on the Way, 11 November

Led by Tom Hinds & Helen Fitch-Hunter

As always, our Wisdom on the Way event included a silent contemplative walk. At Greenacres Chiltern, Beaconsfield we were able to walk the woodland labyrinth on site, as we reflected on the material presented by

Companion Tom Hinds on the subject of "Living Towards Dying and the Transforming Hereafter?" There were additional creative and reflective elements to the day led by Companion Helen Fitch-Hunter.



Greenacres Chiltern

The flower with its petals represented individuals - both ourselves and others - as we finished our contemplation of dying. We all had freedom to alter, embellish or write on the coloured paper cut outs as we removed the petals and "shredded" the flower.



Individual petals of our lives were contained within the unity of the whole.

Welcome to new Friends of Contemplative Fire

A very warm welcome to 3 new Friends:

- Mary McCabe from Sheffield
- Cathy Nutt from Sheffield
- Susanne Tietze from Sheffield



Still Waters

Sirach 24, 17-20

Like a vine I caused loveliness to bud,
and my blossoms became glorious and
abundant fruit.

I am the mother of beautiful love, of fear, of
knowledge and of holy hope;
being eternal, I therefore am given to all my
children to those who are named by him.
Come to me, you who desire me and eat your
fill of my produce.

For the remembrance of me is sweeter than
honey, and my inheritance sweeter than the
honeycomb.

Charlotte Wright



Sanctus

Philip has let us know that you can now watch
“*Sanctus*”, the original Contemplative Fire film
of a few early voices and venues of CF, on the
website or YouTube.

<https://contemplativefire.org/resources/media/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gld2YZpBWhI&feature=youtu.be>

Vincent Strudwick Lecture 2017

Published December 1, 2017 | By *GTF Admin*

THE RELIGION OF NO RELIGION - A PERSONAL REFLECTION - THE VERY REV'D JOHN MOSES, KCVO JOHN MACQUARRIE PROFESSOR OF ANGLICAN THEOLOGY

Opinion polls among the population at large have long since drawn attention to the decline in church attendance and in the use of the occasional offices in churches throughout the United Kingdom. It was possible, however, for an earlier generation to take some comfort from the fact that large numbers of people fitted into a category that could justly be described as ‘believing without belonging.’ Professor Linda Woodhead’s lecture, the Sixth Annual Vincent Strudwick Lecture, required a large audience in Oxford to face the facts that are now becoming self-evident as increasingly large numbers of people refuse to acknowledge the claims of belief.

The title of Professor Woodhead’s lecture – *The Religion of No Religion: Are the ‘Nones’ Religious, Spiritual or Neither?* – hinted at the questions that must be addressed by those who care about the claims of personal faith, the role of the churches, and the religious dimension in public life. It is a commonplace to speak of a loss of confidence in the churches and of a growing dissent from the claims of organised religion – things that are being reflected also in the United States and, indeed, in other faith communities – but surveys conducted in the UK between 1983 and 2017 suggest that those who make no claim to religion or spirituality have increased in percentage terms throughout that period from 31% to 53%. It is a sobering statistic and one that is borne out by the findings of local research projects.

The loss of deference across the board, the breakdown of trust in public institutions, and the degree to which attitudes and commitments have changed where the churches are concerned, can perhaps be seen most clearly in the ways that people now approach the funeral service. It is no longer a question of turning to the Prayer Book and allowing the priest to read the service. What is often wanted – leaving the Humanist Service on one side – will often be a mixture of words and music that are both religious and non-religious, together with a high degree of personal participation by members of the family and friends.

The outpouring of public grief that attended the death and the funeral service of Princess Diana in the UK in 1997 hinted, however, at something else: the need for ritual – personal and public – which might unite a community, a nation, in their grief. It certainly served to bring home the question about the things that society at large is in danger of losing, if God and the churches no longer speak to people and hold for them the articles of faith, the traditions of worship, and the age-old connections across the many constituencies of community life.

But is it possible to identify the basic ingredients which are so often to be found in what might called the religion or the spirituality of the 'Nones'? Certainly some would place an emphasis upon elements that are experiential (life is for living), liberal (a loving kindness to all), romantic (and especially in relation to the natural world), and pragmatic (if it works all well and good). It is a list that demands critical attention, and not least of all by churches that aspire to be communities of faith rather than groups of like-minded people with some shared values.

The lecture – together with the extended question and answer session that followed – held up a mirror to the face of the churches, puncturing the complacency that can so easily overtake all institutions, and yet was marvellously devoid of the pessimism that could so easily have attended any recital of the hard facts and the questions that do not lend themselves to easy answers. There are many people for whom Vincent Strudwick has represented down the years a proper awareness of the importance of the religious dimension in public life. This lecture raised some of the important questions that have to be addressed by those who carry any responsibility for the continuing life of the Christian churches, but are also relevant to clergy and ministers in all religious traditions in these uncertain times.

<http://blog.gtfeducation.org/vincent-strudwick-lecture-2017/> Graduate Theological Foundation

The Politics of Forgiveness

As a follower of the Forgiveness Project, I would be interested in any thoughts or observations about Richard's lecture. With thanks, Gill.

gillgreenwood@tiscali.co.uk



“One of the highlights of the year was our annual lecture delivered by writer and former Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway.

For those of you who attended, you will remember Richard's sensitive and thought-provoking navigation of forgiveness in our social and political institutions. For those of you who were unable to attend, you can now view the lecture online.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n42DHWI-WYYU&feature=youtu.be>

Contemplation Cloud

“I watched a tiny cloud change form just now
In the space after Morning Prayer.
From a four mounded shape of puffy white
It remoulded itself in the changing air.
While I watched the gradual shift take place,
I thought of the words of blessing released –
"The Lord look upon me with favour
and grant me peace.”

M. L. Stewart

<https://contemplativefire.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Sparks-Embers-Fall-2017.pdf>

Newsletter created, compiled and edited by
Manuela Cheney.



Contemplative Fire Canada

Some Changes Within Our Community

On Saturday 2nd Dec, Companions and Friends of Contemplative Fire Toronto met for a Drawing-Together-Day. It was a time to draw us together around our founding Vision, Values and Hope for the future. I wish all of you had been able to join us that day, but some live a long way from Toronto, and for others, life has other calls on our time. I want to catch all of you up on a few changes that we shared with the community that day.

We thanked Phil and Manuela Cheney for their years of service.

Phil retired as Board Chair after four years and Manuela as Admin after nearly two. Both remain Companions on the Way and are actively pursuing personal projects.



We welcomed Jo-Anne Raynes as our new Board Chair

Jo-Anne has been engaged with Contemplative Fire from its arrival in Canada in 2008. She has been an active Board member for the last three years and brings many gifts from her deep spirituality and her years in business, as a financial services executive and work with non-profits.



We welcomed Simone Nieuwolt into a new role as Community Co-ordinator

Simone's role will be a 'glue' for our community. She will be the presence behind info@contemplativefire.ca. If you have questions or inquiries, Simone will be your first responder. She is a retired teacher with special interests in art, young people and growing spiritually.



We shared the news that I (Anne) will be stepping aside from leading the Toronto Community to focus more on the national side. My husband and I will potentially be moving to British Columbia.

Hugh and I remain as Companions on the Way. We hope in the near future, to make an offering that will help Contemplative Fire spread across our country. The new communities will be less clergy led, more community led. At this time, the Toronto community is moving in that direction. We are exploring the start-up of a West Toronto Community using the community model.

We experienced Deep Listening Groups

We adapted our usual Deep Listening Groups to accommodate the desire to form friendships focused on spiritual growth. Sharing, listening and gentle questions form the heart of these groups. We hope to see many more develop.

With love and prayers

Anne +

Contemplative Fire, Community Leader Canada

This Old Heart of Mine



Reverend Giles Fraser recently had a heart attack followed by quadruple bypass surgery. His heart has suddenly become very real to him in a way it never was before. This is life and death stuff, and he has been forced to look at changing his ways.

He sets out to find people who can help him understand the workings of this most resonant and symbolic of organs.

How can he find a way to live better with his quite literally broken heart? And how can he understand the human heart in its broader context - negotiating a path from the pump, to the Valentine's Day card emblazoned with the instantly recognisable two-curves-with-a-point-at-the-bottom?

The heart has been demoted in relation to the status of the brain. Death is no longer decided by the stopping of the heart, but by brain death. The heart can be re-plumbed, jump-started, and even transplanted. And yet it retains a mystique and is, for many of us across culture and time, the place where we feel our true self to be located, as well as our emotions and the torch of our romantic passions - a sacred heart for many.

Episode 1: The Broken Heart

Giles meets cultural historian Dr Fay Bound Alberti at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey and ask how the landmark moments in the story of heart surgery and medicine to fix the pump - the transplants and bypasses - relate to the heart as poetic symbol. The heart has long represented love and courage, and been perceived of as the home of emotions. Is cutting edge science hinting that the Romantic poets were right all along? Recent research into the heart is tantalisingly suggestive of the idea that the heart is associated with emotion on a chemical level, and might even be able to transfer memory during transplant.

Producer: Victoria Shepherd

A Somethin' Else production for BBC Radio 4.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09hrn9m>

Charitable Incorporated Organisation status

Parliament has agreed changes to enable incorporated charities and community interest companies to become charitable incorporated organisations and the process will begin in January. A delegated legislation committee yesterday agreed to amendments that were set out in an order earlier this autumn. The Charity Commission has now set out a timetable and guidance for incorporated charities which wish to convert. CIOs are a relatively new legal form, which were introduced by the Charities Act 2011. They have become a popular legal form for new charities as they offer the protections of incorporated status without having to register and file with Companies House as well as the Charity Commission, with over half of new charities opting to be a CIO. New organisations have been able to register as CIOs since 2013 and unincorporated charities have been able to convert since 2014. But up until now incorporated charities have not been able to become CIOs. The motion to permit CIO conversion for incorporated charities was moved by Tracey Crouch, minister for civil society, who told the committee that it is "the only legal structure designed just for charities" and was popular with charities because it is "subject to a single regulator regime under the Charity Commission, rather than a dual regulatory regime under both the Charity Commission and Companies House". She added that: "To help manage demand the Charity Commission has proposed phasing the availability of the conversion process."

See more at:

<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/parliament-gives-cio-conversion-for-incorporated-charities-the-go-ahead.html#sthash.fAo93bpL.dpuf>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legislative-changes-affecting-the-charitable-incorporated-organisation-cio>
