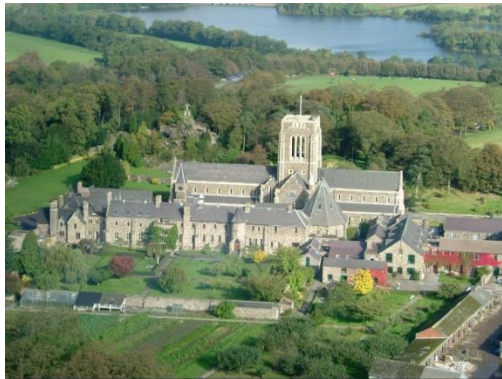


Contemplative Fire Post

February 2018 – no.28



Community Fellowship Weekend



*Mount St Bernard Abbey, Oaks Rd, Coalville,
Leicestershire, LE67 5UL
Friday March 9th - Sunday March 11th*

Companions and Friends of Contemplative Fire will be exploring what it means to be In Community together. Set at Mount St Bernard Abbey near Loughborough in the Midlands, we hope it will offer reasonable access to all and give an opportunity to meet with those in the Midlands who have less opportunity to attend Contemplative Fire events.

The Abbey itself follows the Cistercian rule, which means simplicity and silent contemplation as a path to grow closer to God. They are very interested to hear of different ways of building community, especially a dispersed community such as ours, and have generously offered their hospitality for our weekend.



PAINFUL GRACE

His hands had created atoms and elements
had crafted galaxies and the human brain
now He offered them to the hammer and nails.

His feet had walked the universe
and trodden the trails of shepherds and outcasts
now, nailed, they bore His dying weight.

His brow which had felt the force of stormy wind
and the balm of a woman's precious nard
now dripped blood from the mocking thorny crown.

The man from heaven

crucified on earth

for my salvation.

Amazing, painful grace.

- Joy Tobler -

'CROSSBEAMS' - Joy Tobler's latest poetry collection focuses on the Cross, and could be used as a Lent devotional aid. Copies cost £6 + £1.50 p&p, available from Joy: 25 Jackson Court, Hazlemere, High Wycombe, HP15 7TZ (01494 818172; jtabigailjoy@gmail.com)

Welcome to a new Companion

A very warm welcome to Sally Rawthore, who has been travelling with CF North.



Prayer Cards

As part of the hidden work of the community, Companions have been and will be receiving prayer cards.



In prayer, one with Christ, we hold everyone in our hearts
and the secret longings of all become our own

(attributed to Thomas Merton)

Meeting of the Trustees, 20/1/18

Francoise Pinteaux-Jones, Chair of Trustees, writes:

Faced with the requirements of a new employee, a new Book-keeper and (possibly) a new Treasurer, the Board has taken a closer look at the management of its finances and is considering a range of changes including the presentation of the accounts, (which can be found on the website).

Our "new employee", namely our administrator, Tina, gave an update on our membership and on the progress of the website, noting the key role unstintingly played by Helen in this long drawn-out project. The Trustees look to the involvement and contributions of interested companions. Indeed, much hope is pinned on a fruitful use of the website, notably it is intended to feature monthly blog posts from Companions who will offer spiritual challenge and equip us with theological formation on a monthly basis.

The Trustees passed a Special Resolution to convert to CIO status:-

It is hereby resolved that Contemplative Fire change its legal status from a charity, registered with the Charity Commission (charity number 1106392) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (company number 05141218), to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Associate model.

This resolution will allow Contemplative Fire to finally transfer its registration with the Charities Commission.

The Trustees are exploring ways to uphold their link with Contemplative Fire Canada - Companions input welcome.

Having received and discussed the Hub's Terms of Reference, the Trustees are now exploring ways to work together.

Trustees: Francoise, Charlotte Wright, Elaine Wilkins, Jeremy Timm, Hilary Garraway, Caroline Newton.

Future meetings: Wed 23 May, Tues 24 July, Sat 27 Oct.



"On the Road": Some prayer feedback!

Ali Dorey writes:

Some of you may remember that back in November I sent a request to us all for prayers for a "Fresh Expressions" event in York called "On the Road". It was a bit of a "seize the moment" kind of request. Thank you to those who responded in prayer and other ways, sometimes with questions, and apologies that there has been radio silence since!

On the Road was one of the now annual Anglican (Church of England) day events that gather people from parishes across the UK who are interested in growing "fresh expressions of church". For those who are unsure what that phrase means, basically it is referring to things like Contemplative Fire - communities that are exploring following Jesus (or "Followers of the Way" as people in the early church often identified themselves, and as we may do, too), but not within the church as we knew it. A long time ago, a 40 second video was made explaining what a fresh expression of church is, which always makes me smile:
https://youtu.be/PfF_-wbMr3M

I work for Fresh Expressions UK, which is a small team of people from various denominations of church, all of whom are trying to encourage everyone in the church, and those who would define themselves as not in the church, to explore following the Way together and growing more of these (often very small)

communities of encouragement, worship, companionship and mission. To find out more about us: <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/> or look on our You Tube channel (click on the You Tube symbol top right hand corner of our website) for videos of people who are running fresh expressions of church of various kinds.

On the Road was a very good day, although not without its challenges. The FX UK team is in a phase of handing on the baton of its work to the various denominations of church (at this stage of growth, encouraging them to take responsibility for progressing it, rather than relying on us so much), and so the Church of England has decided itself to put on these annual days to encourage fresh expressions (FX) and “pioneering” across the board. But, typically, handing over control involves watching someone do something not as well as they might! So there were some very frustrating aspects to the day, but by and large all the workshops and seminars/places of interaction between people were very positive. I helped to facilitate a workshop called “*Beyond the new*” about how FX can keep going longer term. We didn’t expect many people to come to it, but we were inundated, with about 80 people all crammed into every corner of the building we’d been allocated. Some had been growing FX long term, some hadn’t started yet, but wanted to know whether any FX actually survives longer term, as part of weighing up how much to prioritise this, etc. St Cuthbert’s House of Prayer, where we held the workshop, was very fresh expression-like itself, being a traditional church building that had been completely revamped very imaginatively inside, so the whole of the main room was like one enormous creative prayer room, with all sorts of colourful and poetic things on the walls, squishy seats and carpeted areas with coffee tables etc. It felt very hospitable, and still alluringly ancient (I think it’s a listed building, so they just took the pews out and created new spaces inside, including a kind of glass pod room that appears suspended over the main downstairs room. It is here if you want to explore more: St Cuthbert’s House of Prayer, Peasholme Green, York, YO1 7PW (01904) 624190 www.yhop.co.uk).

My particular contribution to the day was to facilitate conversation among about 30 people, about relationships and how pioneers relate to the different levels of structures of the Church of England, and how good relationships are often a challenge to grow and maintain, but are essential to the survival of fragile new communities. One of the resounding lessons

people shared was that the quality of relationships between people in any expression of church is often very poor/shallow. And yet, it’s one of the things that Jesus says repeatedly that his Way is the Way of love. That we are to love one another. Actually one of the things that FX often teaches the wider church is about this - how to love across significant cultural difference. We obviously all face our challenges with this within CF, but also I often cite examples of the diversity we have among us, and the love with which we choose to relate as a prophetic example for other expressions of church. It is difficult to do, though, I know.

Anyway, thank you if you prayed for *On the Road*. It was significant. Perhaps the main thing to note was that I think about 700 people came from across the UK, and the positive, creative, possibility-exploring buzz in the rooms all over York where seminars and conversations were held was palpable. Next November a similar event will be held in Ely, organised by Ely diocese, who are a bit further on with the whole fresh expressions agenda than York diocese, so hopefully it will be good.

Revd Ali Dorey (a further article will appear in the next CF Post)



CF North Review Day

Jeremy Timm writes:

At our review day, Companions in the North started our time together with a period of "Awakening"..... awakening our souls to the Divine Presence, to each other and to the wider CF Community. As a part of this time we each had a stone, which the previous week had been rolling up and down on a Cornish beach. We held and warmed the cold pebbles in our grasps as we carried our own dreams, hopes and concerns for CF into our shared Silence. Then in a lovely moment, we swapped stones with our neighbour and, as it were, carried their concerns for them and built a small cairn or waymarker with each other's stones. This carrying of each other's prayers was a tangible sign of what it means to be in caring community with each other.



At the end of the day we were invited to take a stone home and place it in our own sacred spaces, so that when we see it we would be reminded of the community to which we belong and its various needs. I have placed mine by a small Buddha and find myself holding it, warming it again, as I think about CF and my fellow companions.



A Companion was asked to share something of his journey -

Malcolm Peet writes:

At the do for my retirement from the NHS Trust that I worked for as a consultant psychiatrist, I was given a blessing by the Roman Catholic Priest who was a Chaplain for the Trust. The Medical Director, who was due to say a few words next, was rendered uncharacteristically speechless. He had been confronted by a world that is normally kept separate from that of psychiatry.

It was about ten years ago that I returned to Christianity after meandering for decades along various avenues of 'spirituality'. The occasion for this was reading the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century Swedish scientist turned Christian mystic. As a psychiatrist, though, I had to accept that his writings were based on visionary experiences that most of my colleagues would regard as psychotic. Indeed, there are at least two academic articles in the psychiatric literature which conclude that Swedenborg was in fact schizophrenic. Similar articles can be found about other Christian mystics: even Saint Paul's visionary experiences have been 'diagnosed' as attacks of temporal lobe epilepsy. Implicit in such formulations is the notion that being given a diagnosis invalidates the experience: personally, I would find it impossible to help someone if the first stage in the process had to involve invalidating the experiences that they were telling me about!

My work for the Trust involved me entering into some very strange realities indeed. We had set up a team to help young people who were starting to have experiences that are usually regarded as 'psychotic', such as hallucinations (for example, seeing or hearing things that other people do not) or delusions (ideas that are evidently untrue, often bizarre, and not part of any subculture). Note the bit there about subculture: I cannot help but observe that Jesus was regarded as mad to the point of needing restraint [Mark 3:21], but presumably he would not today be diagnosed as deluded because he and the twelve disciples formed a subculture! Can you really cure yourself of insanity by persuading enough people that you are right?

Helping young people who are having these experiences is very demanding work. Sometimes one questions one's own grasp of reality. As the team Consultant, one of my roles was to offer support to others in the team who had become unsettled or confused by their

involvement with these young people; the difficulties could range widely from an overt risk of suicide or harming others, through to child protection issues and spiritual matters such as clients believing that they themselves, or others, were demonically possessed. For the more overtly spiritual problems, we had the help of the priest who blessed me when I retired.

Although I was working with a very supportive team, it is a strange fact that the only mental health workers who do not have an allocated personal supervisor are the consultant psychiatrists. Working in this field brings home forcefully an understanding that reality in this world is relative. In dealing with this, it is necessary to have a stable platform to work from. Conventionally, this is provided in psychiatry by a rather rigidly defined set of 'diagnostic criteria' which are set by a committee of international 'experts', according to which patients are diagnosed based upon the experiences that they describe. It has long seemed to me that this simply sets up arbitrary limits to 'normality' and then judges other people against that, when the only criterion for offering help should be the distress of the person who is suffering. In fact, it has been shown that a substantial minority of the population have experiences that technically meet the definitions of delusions or hallucinations, but they never feel the need to seek help.

Ultimately, the only Reality is God. I know this following a spiritual experience of my own which left me with an absolute certainty, but which I am quite unable to articulate coherently. In this regard I offer a quotation from Saint Augustine, who said that "Man can say nothing of what he is incapable of feeling, *but he can feel what he is incapable of putting into words*". I am quite sure that most psychiatrists would find this sort of thing bizarre to the point of being concerned for my mental well-being, but the certainty of God as the ultimate and only absolute Reality has been, and remains, my platform for life.



Philip Roderick writes:

There is an event in Cambridge in April, featuring the profound work of the late theologian Raimon Panikkar. Two of his books "*The Rhythm of Being*" and "*Christophany*" are amongst my favourites. +Rowan will be present. The link is:

<https://www.magd.cam.ac.uk/events/raimon-panikkar>

Vincent Strudwick writes:

I have a book you may wish to include in CF Post. It is 'THE ART OF THOMAS MERTON - A DIVINE PASSION IN WORD AND VISION' and is by John Moses, sometime Dean of St Paul's Cathedral' and just published by Franciscan Media ISBN 978-163253-184-1.

It is commended by Fiona Gardner (author of 'Thomas Merton and the Child Mind') and I write: 'John Moses breaks new ground in this scholarly yet accessible anthology based on Merton's curious 'blobs of ink'. He opens doors for us to get immersed in this complex monk's understanding of the cosmic dance of life, lived out in each of us in response to God's call. His interpretation of Merton's art is offered to be prayed, not merely read, for through his understanding of the nature and practice of prayer, Merton demonstrated a way of being alive that focuses the Christian hope for all whose awareness is awakened.'



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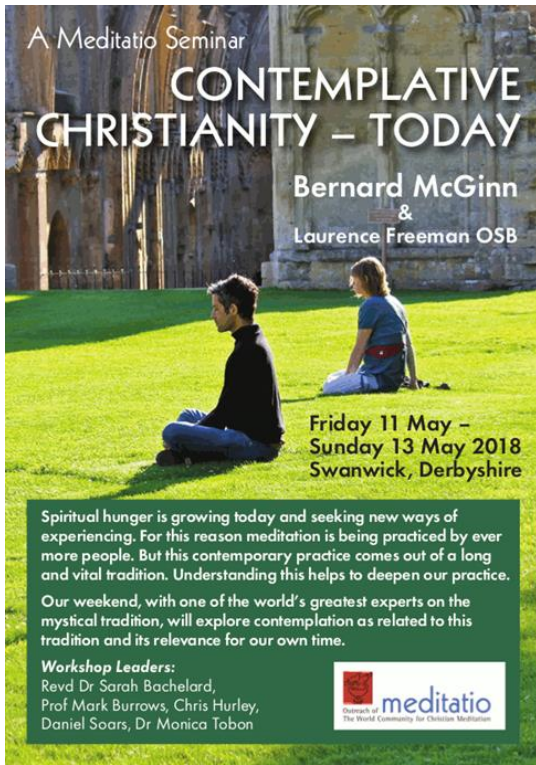
The Cecilia's List Website

Please find below a link to The Cecilia's List website, which was launched on the 22nd November 2017. The site is intended to encourage people looking for music for church services to choose music by women more often. I hope this is of interest. <http://www.ceciliaslist.org>

Kind regards,

Holly Pye

Administrator, Tavener Centre, Winchester University



Companions may be interested in the other holidays on offer too, with small groups.



Dear Friends

We are really delighted to welcome Bernard McGinn as our keynote speaker at the next Meditatio Seminar here in the UK in May. Bernard McGinn as you know is the leading expert on the Western Mystical Tradition and we are very honoured that he accepted our invitation to come to England for this Seminar. Online booking is available here:

<http://bit.ly/ContemplativeChristianityToday>

Journeying

“Walking holidays with a spiritual intent: journeying to the edge to find the centre”

Susan Fogarty writes:

As you may know I’m a *Journeying* leader and am leading a holiday to the Pilgrim Places of Pen Llyn. There is one place remaining with 9 other guests and 2 journey leaders - Monday 30th April to Friday 4th May - hopefully crossing to Bardsey too, if the weather is good.

SMALL GROUP WALKING HOLIDAYS IN AN INFORMAL CHRISTIAN AMBIENCE TO PLACES AT THE EDGE...

- Pilgrim Places of Pen Llyn, Wales (April 30 – 4 May)
 - St Davids, Pembrokeshire, Wales (19 - 25 June)
 - Isle of Skye, Scotland (23 - 30 June)
 - Fair Isle, Scotland (2 - 10 July)
 - Stones, Rivers and Islands, Pembrokeshire, Wales (26 – 30 July)
 - Isle of Man (13 – 18 August)
 - The Scottish Borders (3 - 8 September)
- www.journeying.co.uk 0191 4382535
info@journeying.co.uk

Est. 1998. PATRON: Rt. Revd John Pritchard

Next issue: reflections from the Community Weekend Retreat at Holland House.