



Barbara Beshoar

Thin Places

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Thin Places, an ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, is published by the Spiritual Life Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Look for *Thin Places* at:
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Brood a while longer . . .

by the Rev. Dr. Meghan Gage-Finn

With gratitude, I have the opportunity to offer my thoughts in this space. As I write, on November 2, 2020, things feel muddled and mired all around me, and within me in my own spirit. We are on the eve of an agonizing and antagonistic national election, and daily COVID case counts in Minnesota are on the rise. The economy is in a perilous imbalance and creation itself is crying out in fragility for change. God is calling people of faith (still) to rise up to participate in the work of racial justice, and our communal ways of being together are more challenged each day. Even as people of hope and light, it is hard to see and feel beyond the next moment, when the world may turn upside down all over again, when all we have to offer are sighs too deep for words. It is hard to know what will speak to our collective hearts six months on, while holding so much in tension in this present space. The chaos of this year has started to feel almost normative. *Almost.*

I find myself with more questions than assurances. What will the waiting of Advent feel like in 2020, as we orient our prayers to welcome the Christ light into our lives? What will turning toward the New Year and Epiphany hold for us, and how will we feel about the promise of next spring, fully one year after we all started adjusting and re-evaluating? To what will we attune our ears and our hearts, as we listen into Lent, and will we allow ourselves the audacity to proclaim, fully, resurrection joy come Easter morning?

My questions come from a need to know, a need to root myself in something solid and sure. I have found myself returning to words from poet Mary Oliver, from *Dream Work*. They resonate with me for their honesty and authenticity to speak to human experience, but especially to what 2020 has been teaching me.

*“And now I understand something so frightening & wonderful—
how the mind clings to the road it knows,
rushing through crossroads, sticking
like lint to the familiar.”*

I do find myself bending toward the familiar. But in some confusing sense, I don't know what *familiar* means any longer. What was at one time so utterly unfamiliar, wearing masks and keeping distance, is routinized. Some system or order has been established in the chaos, and yet it remains undeniably chaos. It is frightening, even as it pulls from me a sense of awe.

I am drawn back to *Genesis 1*, remembering that God created out of chaos, the “watery abyss,” which had form, function, and purpose. In Hebrew it is *tehom*, meaning deep, sea, or chasm. Theologian Catherine Keller wrote in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* that in this depth is a fluidity, which generates and regenerates itself and everything else, with no clear beginning or end, in a kind of divine chaos. Within the chaos, the Spirit itself is vibrating; it is “a pulsing, folding force.” She goes on to say of chaotic creation, “What appears first as formless, a dense shadow shot through with spectral afterimages, may be incubating the form you need. Brood a while longer.” . . . It is a bold dare. It is holy invitation.

If I choose to understand *Genesis 1* in this way—that God created good not out of nothing but out of chaos—then Keller’s description of creation leads to an added understanding. Not only did God create out of the *something* of chaos, but God did so with the power of the Spirit. Something I truly need just may be incubating for me, within and around me, if I allow myself to brood, just a little. What might be nurtured if I pause at the crossroads just for a moment? What new life might be born in surprising or creative form if I plant our feet in the chaos and let the depths of its fluidity wash over us? God created from the very beginning out of a living voice, through collaboration with the Spirit. And that living voice and collaborative Spirit continues as a pulsing and enfolding force today, drawing all of us in, drawing all of us together.

Keller shows “what can be born of our cloudiest entanglements.” It feels like the entanglements of our hearts, our faith, our sense of community, are at their cloudiest, to be sure, and admittedly. It is not my inclination to brood any longer than I have to. But I must realize that—like anything I strive to be better at—it takes practice and perseverance.

Tomorrow morning, I will head out on the darkened,

Contact Us

Do you know of anyone—it’s free to all who ask—who would like to receive this ecumenical newsletter?

If you do, please contact Kristin Kieft at news@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

If you know of an up-coming *Opportunity* that would be of interest to other readers, or if you have any other questions or comments, please contact us at: thinplaces_us@msn.com

leaf-strewn streets in the early morning, willing my running shoes to carry me toward prayer, comfort, release, security, and some semblance of familiarity. My mind and heart cling to these roads I know, when so many other paths before me feel uncertain. I will draw in the crisp air, knowing the days are only getting cooler and shorter. Then I will return home, unlock the front door, and begin another day of working and supporting my three school-age children through distance learning.

My hope is that we can continue to feel connected through this space in the weeks and months ahead. Some of the current chaos will be present still, and perhaps even more familiar, and new disarray may be in the air. But the lengthening days will return; the ground will thaw and warm again. Bulbs will be pushing up from winter slumber. God’s breath will be stretching over and through whatever is the current chaos, making something good.

As God’s beloved, may we trust in God’s creative, collaborative Spirit, and trust God as active in the wild and open spaces, at the chaotic crossroads. And together, may we brood a while longer.

Meghan Gage-Finn serves as Executive Associate Pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, a part of the pastoral staff for over thirteen years. She was baptized, confirmed, and ordained in the same Presbyterian congregation in Michigan, where she heard the Spirit’s first calling into ministry.

As a triathlete and veteran marathon runner, she finds connections to God and community while being out in nature, which more often invites her to slow down, rather than speed up. Meghan, her husband, and their three young children enjoy baking, hiking, and reading together.

Meghan can be reached at mgage-finn@wpc-mpls.org.

Ongoing Opportunities

Family Faith Toolkits Available

Responding to the welcome given to our Summer and Fall editions, the MN Conference UCC, the Ministry Lab, and a collaborative team are producing weekly Family Faith Toolkits for **Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany**.

Each Family toolkit includes:

- an interactive introductory video with musician Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, exploring the week’s Scripture and theme
- a suggested children’s book highlighting the theme

- an audio recorded contemplative practice for indoors or out
- crafts and art projects
- a social justice suggestion
- an intergenerational game
- and three "Wondering Questions" to fuel journaling and family discussion

Also available is a Leader Toolkit which expands on the theme with additional book suggestions, games, social justice suggestions, intergenerational craft projects and (sometimes!) extended contemplative prompts.

If you would like a weekly email with this content, contact sandyk@uccmn.org.

Family Faith Toolkits are also available here:

<https://www.uccmn.org/uccmn-events/youth-faith-formation-events/fall-family-toolkit/>

They are provided by a collaborative team, including

The Ministry Lab, United Theological Seminary

767 Eustis Street, Suite 140, St. Paul

For additional information about this and other upcoming Opportunities: 651.894.2927 or ministrylab@unitedseminary.edu or www.unitedseminary.edu.

Sunday Night Contemplative Worship

. . . at Pilgrim Lutheran continues this winter—and continues to evolve. Contemplative worship gatherings will happen via Zoom and Facebook live—including two in-person offerings of contemplative live music:

- **Sundays, Dec. 6 & 20**—reflective music for in-person gathering—5:30-6:00 p.m. and 6:51-7:21 p.m., with advanced sign-up; space limited to 30 people but listening online will also be an option
- **Sunday, Dec. 13**, 8:00 p.m.—Compline: Choral Contemplative Prayer, live-streamed via Facebook
- **Sundays, Jan. 10, Jan. 24, Feb. 14**, 6:51 p.m.—Woven Together in Spirit: Contemplative Worship, followed by reflections and conversation—via Zoom
- **Lenten Sundays**, Feb. 28, March 14 & 28, 6:51 p.m.—Holden Contemplative Evening Prayer, followed by coffee conversation—via Zoom:

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 1935 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul

For additional information and links for these and other upcoming opportunities: www.pilgrimstpaul.org.

Mystic-a-Month Online Series

Gaining momentum from our Mystics I and Mystics II series in 2019, this monthly format gives participants the same opportunity to deeply engage the teachings of a single teacher from the tradition (Evelyn Underhill and Hildegard of Bingen in recent months—Kabir and

Eihei Dogen coming up). Our presenters include an overview of each mystic’s context as well as a deeper dive into the unique contributions that each mystic made to his/her times.

Mystics were often controversial or not recognized in their own times, and even in our times, many conventional settings do not make room for the wisdom teaching of the mystics.

Join us for a fascinating view into some of the most mature and mysterious figures from our past:

Second Mondays, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

also:

Online Prayer Series

Many spiritual seekers report having had little access to teaching on specific recognized prayer forms. The Prayer series consists of short-sessions on particular Christian prayer forms, hoping to offer practical support to people who yearn to pray.

Each short session includes an overview of the prayer form, specific instructions and an experience of the prayer form, and opportunity to share with others. Sessions are stand-alone, meaning you can attend one or all of them!:

Fourth Sundays, 5:00-8:00 p.m.

The Episcopal House of Prayer,

14215 Fruit Farm Road, Collegeville, MN

and The House of Prayer in the City,

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Minneapolis

To register for these teaching sessions and for information about these and other up-coming opportunities—like our **Group Spiritual Direction**,

“Celebrating Advent

means being able to wait.

Waiting is an art that our impatient age has forgotten. It wants to break open the ripe fruit when it has hardly finished planting the shoot. . . .

Whoever does not know the austere blessedness of waiting, will never experience the full blessing of fulfillment. Those who do not know how it feels to struggle anxiously with the deepest questions of life, cannot even dream of the splendor of the moment in which clarity is illuminated for them.

For the greatest, most profound, tenderest things in the world, we must wait.

It happens not here in the storm
but according to the divine laws of sprouting,
of becoming.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is in the Manger*

Group *Lectio Divina*, and Group Book Inquiries:

320.363.3293 or houseprayer@csbsju.edu or
www.ehouseofprayer.org or
www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopc.

Tending the Call:

Caring for the Life of Spiritual Leaders and Directors

Tending the Call is a newly established resource and “gathering place” at the Christos Center to support, enrich, and encourage spiritual leaders. Read more at www.christoscenter.org/tending-the-call. And join us for our quarterly events:

- **Saturday, February 1: Tending the Call: Managing Grief in the Midst of Ambiguity**, 9:00 a.m.-noon, at the Center or via Zoom, details coming soon

- **Sunday, April 1: Using the Enneagram in Your Ministry**, 9:00 a.m.-noon, at the Center or via Zoom
Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities (perhaps to put 2020 behind us)—like

- our **Annual Christmas Quiet (Dec. 8)** and the
- **New Year’s Eve Quiet, with Communion (Dec. 31)** or
- **Quiet Retreat Day: All is Gift, with Tom Allen (Jan. 16)**
651.653.8207 or www.christoscenter.org or
ladonna@christoscenter.org.

One-Time Opportunities

Advent Women, in Song and Scripture

Spend an event with the women of the Gospels—Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, and other women healed by Christ who have much to teach you about the waiting, hoping and joys of Advent.

Katy Weir, teacher and musician, will present the Advent stories in a new way, giving a presentation that is part Bible study and part concert:

Monday, December 14, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

also:

School of Discernment

You will have the opportunity to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, under the guidance of skilled listeners

“Here alone with you in the gathering darkness, it would be easier, Lord, if I could reach out and embrace you with the power of my mind. But only love can pierce the darkness in which alone you can be found.”

Prayer of Surrender, from *The Cloud of Unknowing*

and teachers. This week-end retreat will include daily prayer with the monastic community, sessions on the practice of discernment, reflection questions for quiet time, one-on-one meetings with spiritual directors and time for personal prayer.

Teachers for this year’s **School** will include Kathleen Cahalan, a professor of practical theology at Saint John’s University School of Theology; Sister Virginia Matter, spiritual director and teacher of Centering Prayer; and Sam Rahberg, spiritual director, Benedictine Oblate, and the Center’s former Director:

Friday, December 4, at 10:00 a.m.-

Sunday, December 6, at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom
The Benedictine Center, St. Paul’s Monastery
2675 Benet Road, Maplewood

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like **Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!** (Dec.1) and the **Centering Prayer Group** (Wednesdays, 6:30-7:20 a.m.):
info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or
www.benedictinecenter.org.

Advent Retreat: Spiritual Imagination and the Nativity

What if every time: . . . *you saw a Nativity scene, you visualized . . . you heard a Christmas song, it reminded you . . . you encountered the Christmas story, you remembered . . . ?*

This weekly Advent Retreat will use storytelling, music, and guided visualization to bring participants deep into the heart of the meaningful metaphors of the Christmas story.

- December 5, **The Annunciation: Saying Yes**
- December 12, **The Epiphany: Our Journey**
- December 19, **The Nativity: Wonder & Awe**

Three Saturdays, 10:00-11:15 a.m.—via Zoom
Loyola Spirituality Center

389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul

For information or registration for this and for other up-coming opportunities—like our Every-Thursdays **Morning Centering Prayer** and **Evening Examen Prayer**:
651.641.0008 or loyolassr@comcast.net or
www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

“Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in our troubled world.”

Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*

Reading and Conversation,

with **Carolyn Holbrook and Diane Wilson**

Please join two longtime writing buddies for a reading and a discussion of their friendship and their newest books.

Carolyn's essay collection, **Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify**, is the compassionate and redemptive story of a prominent Black woman in the Twin Cities literary scene. And Diane's forthcoming novel, **The Seed Keeper**, is a haunting novel spanning several generations, following a Dakota family's struggle to preserve their way of life, and their sacrifices to protect what matters most:

**Tuesday, December 8, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., via Zoom
Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality**

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

To register or for information about this and other up-coming opportunities—including **Walking in Harmony, A Labyrinth Journey** (Dec. 11) and **Writing the Sacred Journey, the Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir: Symbols and Metaphors** (Dec. 11):

www.wisdomwayscenter.org or 651.696.2788 or sausen@wisdomwayscenter.org.

The Hope Journey: A Way Forward in Fraught Times

In this daunting and tumultuous time, hope may be our greatest need, its viability our greatest question.

So many things threaten to send hope to the sidelines. But what is hope? It is certainly more than a positive attitude. It is a stupendous human quality. Hope is a life stance, it's the sense of a way forward, it's the commitment to creating a better world even when we don't feel particularly hopeful. Hope is related to help and the imagination, and it is often birthed in community.

In this two-part online retreat, we reflect on the nature of hope, sources of hope, and habits and practices that encourage hope. We also consider the many gifts that faith contributes to our hope. You will receive readings and poems before each retreat day:

**Two Saturdays, Dec. 12 and Jan. 16, 9:00 a.m.-noon
Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality**

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul

"Changeless and calm,
deep mystery,
Ever more deeply,
rooted in Thee"

Chant by Gerald May, sung slowly and responsively at a service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D. C.

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like our **online Spiritual Direction** and the **Sacred Ground Book Group** (Second Wednesdays): www.sacredgroundspirit.org or 651.696.2798 or info@sacredgroundspirit.org.

A Practical Spirituality of Aging: The Paschal Mystery

During this stay-at-home retreat, via Zoom, we will reflect on how the Paschal mystery of loss, letting go, and new life can help us embrace the invitation to a deeper and richer life in our later years. Afternoons and evenings are for personal reading and reflection: **Monday, January 11-Friday, Jan. 15, 9 a.m.-noon daily** also:

Ash Wednesday Day of Retreat

The morning conference, via Zoom, will set the Ash Wednesday focus, leading participants into off-screen reflection time. The retreat will end with a final time of sharing and prayer.

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 9:00-11:30 a.m. and:

Prayer in Troubled Times: Lent-Again, or still with us?

This 20-minute online worship service will include spoken and sung prayers, scripture, poetry, and intercessions as we accept a Lenten reality we did not choose:

Sunday, February 21, 7:00-7:25 p.m.

**Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN**

For information or registration for these and other up-coming opportunities: 320-363-7112 or www.sbm.osb.org or eantony@csbsju.edu.

Men's Silent Weekend Retreat: "A Listening Heart"

Friday-Sunday, Jan. 15 (7:00 p.m.)-17 (after lunch)

Women's Midweek Retreat: "A Listening Heart"

Tuesday-Thurs., Feb. 16 (7:00 p.m.)-18 (after lunch)

All is Grace. All is Gift. Each human being must embrace the reality of life. But the spiritual pilgrim knows that the meaning of this reality is shaped by the *gift of a listening heart*.

Each of us is called by God to see all of life as gift

"Here I stand, and I say a prayer.

'Come, Lord, come down, come in,
come among us.

Enter into our darkness with your light.

Come fill our emptiness with your presence . . .

Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us."

Celtic Prayer, from the Holy Island of Lindesfarne

and blessing. Are we able to look beyond the obvious to see the sacred?

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration about this or other upcoming opportunities—like a **Healing Retreat for Men and Women** (March 19-21): 763.682.1394 or jpolman@kingshouse.com or www.kingshouse.com.

Overcoming Challenges, With Grit and Grace

This year our annual women's conference celebrating resilience and faith will be offered virtually, but you will still be able to see and listen to these inspirational women share their stories. Our keynote speaker will be Kao Kalia Yang, a Hmong-American writer, teacher, and public speaker based in Minneapolis, who will share her spiritual journey into writing. (For more on her background, her family's history, and the role of Hmong women, you can go to our website and open our November/December newsletter, **At the Center**.)

As a part of her story, Kalia writes, "My grandmother used to say, 'Surrounded by wisdom, without the experience, you won't know how to use it.' At 39—17 years after her passing—I'm still learning the depths of the words she left behind, the model of living she so generously shared, and the love that remains . . . even when someone is gone."

Saturday, January 16, 8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Franciscan Spirituality Center

Normally: **920 Market Street, La Crosse WI**
but during renovations: **River Crossing Square,
500 Second St. S., Suite 201, downtown La Crosse.**
For information or registration for this and other up-

Practice and Perseverance

"What is the practice that matters now? A practice is any act habitually entered into with our whole heart that takes us to the deeper place.

Some of these practices, we might not think of as prayer and meditation: tending the roses, a long, slow walk to no place in particular, [a morning run,] a quiet moment at day's end, being vulnerable in the presence of that person in whose presence we're taken to the deeper place, the pause between two lines of a poem.

There are these acts that re-ground us in the depth dimensions of our life that matter most.

If we're faithful to our practice, our practice will be faithful to us. . . ."

James Finley, writing in Richard Rohr's
Daily Meditation for 6 July 2020

coming opportunities—like **The Christmas Story** (Dec. 15) or **Longest Night: An Evening of Prayer and Reflection** (Dec.21): www.fscenter.org or 608.791.5295 or fscenter@fspa.org.

Winter Hygge Yoga Retreat

"Hygge" is Danish for comfort, or creation of a warm atmosphere and enjoying the good things of life.

Your Retreat Includes:

- Two nights lodging in . he ARC Lodge
- All Meals: vegetarian. home-cooked
- 4 Yoga Sessions (a variety of. yoga styles)
- 30 minute chair massage
- Yoga/Hygge goodies to make your retreat extra cozy

Friday, January 24, at 2:00 p.m.-

Sunday, January 26, at 11:00 a.m.

ARC Retreat Community, Stanchfield, MN

Register at: laurelleafyoga@gmail.com or 320.761.1823
For information about other up-coming opportunities at ARC: 763.689.3540 or www.ARCretreat.org or ARCretreat@hotmail.com.

Reading Opportunities

The Secret Embrace, by Thomas Keating

I want to Write Something So Simply

about love
or about pain
that even
as you are reading
you feel it
and as you read
you keep feeling it
and though it be my story
it will be common,
though it be singular
it will be known to you
so that by the end
you will think—
that it was all the while
yourself arranging the words,
that it was all the time
words that you yourself,
out of your own heart
had been saying.

Mary Oliver, *Evidence*

Father Thomas Keating died on 25 October 2018, at age 95, exactly two years ago as this is being written. ***The Secret Embrace*** is the last of his more than thirty books and has been described by some reviewers as “his parting wisdom for a divided church and country.”

As many may remember, nearly sixty years ago, then in his early forties, Father Thomas took to heart the Second Vatican Council’s injunction to “open the windows” of the monastery. He began to make (in the words of Richard Rohr) “the ancient practice of contemplation an accessible, relevant, and transformative method of prayer,” validating and opening the practice for modern readers through his use of everyday language and his deep understanding of modern psychology.

Father Thomas’ new focus changed the direction of his own life and ministry. He gave up the path that had led to his becoming Abbot of St. Joseph’s Monastery in Massachusetts in 1961, began to study the ancient practice more deeply and to shape his study of modern psychology by what he was learning there. He began to offer workshops and retreats on Centering Prayer, moved to St. Benedict’s Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, and—in time—founded **Contemplative Outreach, Inc.**, which now has Chapters and practitioners in countries around the world. (Minnesota’s own Carol Quest has recently become a member of its Board of Directors.)

In the last months of his long life and in failing health, Father Thomas moved back home to St. Joseph’s in Massachusetts. While there he contacted his nephew,

**“Ring the bells, ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in . . .”**

Leonard Cohen, “Anthem”

**“Christmas is how the light gets in.
The incarnation of love in the world,
in your life and in mine
and in our communities,
is how the light stays strong
when the shadows close in . . .”**

The Rev. Dr. Tim Hart-Andersen,
in a Sermon, Christmas Eve, 2016

Peter Jones, wanting to add a poem he had written to the next edition of ***From the Mind to the Heart***, a beautiful book which they had edited jointly and which included poems and watercolors. Peter visited him, encouraging him to write more poems (the first he’d written since he was a teenager, Father Thomas said). These seven poems became the centerpiece of this beautiful new book, this time with watercolors by Charlotte Frieze depicting the sea, forever in a state of transformation and transcendence.

The Secret Embrace sold out quickly when it was published by Contemplative Outreach (and remained Out of Stock when last checked). But indirect access is available. Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations for *October 18 through 30* focused on the book, offering select passages, with accompanying comments and observations by Richard Rohr and Cynthia Bourgeault [www.cac.org/category/daily-meditations/2020]. And ***Spirituality & Practice: Resources for Spiritual Journeys*** offers an e-course on it, taught by Cynthia Bourgeault [www.spiritualityandpractice.com].

While waiting for the book itself to be available, here is a sample from the Daily Meditation for October 29:

Only the Divine matters,

And because the Divine matters,

Everything matters.

Thomas Keating, from “What Matters”

“In October 2018, two weeks before he died, Thomas Keating emerged briefly from four days in what appeared to be a coma to deliver an extraordinary final message beamed straight to the heart of the world. Acknowledging that ‘an extraordinary moment of civilization seems to be overtaking us,’ he urged the human family to scrap old approaches based on religious or political dogma and ‘begin a new world with one that actually exists,’ a world whose truth is guided by ‘silence and science’ and whose heart is revealed in a universal resurgence of human compassion and creativity.

‘We need to find ways to make these really happen,’ he said. ‘I leave this hope in your hands and hearts, coming as a real inspiration from the heart of God.’

Two momentous years later, his words seem more prophetic than ever “



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*“Brood a while longer . . .”
“Thomas Keating’s ‘parting wisdom
for a divided church and country . . .”
“Holy Harmony. . .”*

Afterwords: “Holy Harmony . . .”

Thomas Keating made a difference in the lives of many, introducing and encouraging them in the practice of Centering Prayer, and perhaps even more deeply changing the direction of their lives, opening a path for them toward the balancing of the power of the mind and the power of silence and surrender.

One of your editors is a tenth-generation Church of Scotland/Presbyterian Elder (going back to a g-g-g-g-g-grandfather who was born in Scotland near Sterling in 1595). In younger years, this sometimes seemed singularly important, seemed to be a significant family (and probably even personal) “accomplishment.” But over the years, this happenstance has become less and less important, replaced by a growing sense that we all are part of the Body of Christ and—even deeper—that we all are the Children of God.

One remembers that near the end of his series of television interviews with Houston Smith (whose *The World’s Religions* became the seminal text for comparative religion), Bill Moyers asked, “After your years of studying the five great faith traditions, where do you worship?” “My local Methodist church.” “Does that mean that you’ve concluded that they have got it right?” Smith laughed. “No, it’s just that I grew up in China, as the son of Methodist missionaries!” Smith’s laugh at being asked if one group “has it right” could have come from his recognition—after his many years of study—that close to the center of all of the great faith traditions is the belief that there is an ultimate Reality underneath and inherent in the world of things, and that all of us have a natural capacity and a longing for union with that Oneness.

Thomas Keating in his parting admonition to put aside “religious and political dogma,” Houston Smith in his understanding of the Perennial Tradition, and a 15th Century Advent Poem all seem to be telling us that what we need in these times, and in all times, goes far beyond iron-clad answers and action plans, goes far deeper . . . to an opening of ourselves to an encompassing and enfolding Holy Harmony,

*“Thou shalt know Him when He comes
Not by any din of drums
Nor the vantages of airs
Nor by anything He wears ~
For His presence known shalt be
By the holy harmony
That His coming makes in thee.”*