



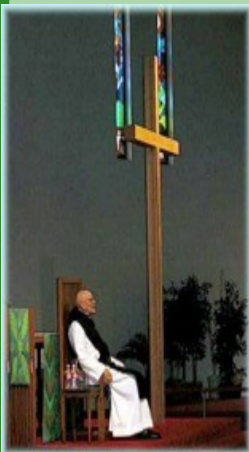
Australasian Centering Prayer Network Newsletter

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WHAT CENTERING PRAYER IS NOT:

- It is not a technique.
- It is not a form of self-hypnosis.
- It is not a relaxation exercise.
- It is not limited to the "felt" presence of God.
- It is not a charismatic gift.
- It is not discursive meditation or affective prayer.



Be still and know that I am God.
Psalm 46:10

Ecumenical Contemplative Outreach Network being formed in Australia and New Zealand



International Centering Prayer Meeting in Melbourne

On the weekend of 6-8 March 2009, a group of individuals from a number of christian denominations in Australia and New Zealand met to discuss the formation of a network to support Centering Prayer Groups. The meeting was held at the Janssen Spirituality Centre in Boronia, a Melbourne suburb.

The main purpose in meeting together was to explore the vision of the Contemplative Outreach, movement, that is to foster the process of transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.

Participants came from South Australia, NSW, Victoria, the ACT and New Zealand. It was noted that there may be groups in QLD, Tasmania, NT and Western Australia and that representatives from these areas may be able to attend the next (inter)national meeting.

Participants also discussed the theological and administrative principles and to share the method of Christian Centering Prayer and to explore together

the its immediate conceptual background.

A taskforce was created and will report back on ways in which the various Centering Prayer groups can benefit from a network.

Centering Prayer Week- end – Keynote Talk by Fr Frank Gerry SVD

This is a gathering that gives me great joy and a deep sense of gratitude. I am just astounded that it seems to have come together so quickly. For some years now I have wondered, would we ever get beyond our individual prayer groups to a movement on a national level? But here we are thinking of more than that, for lo and behold, we are privileged to have someone come all the way from New Zealand. I have been told of the interest of Fr Thomas Keating in our weekend deliberations and that prayer groups from around the centering prayer world are praying for us.

....

It is great to feel part of a worldwide movement of prayer.

Yes, we are riding on a wave

of enthusiasm stirred up by the recent visit of Fr. William Meninger. He accomplished a lot of good in a short time. His visit has brought people together, his encouraging presence, his rich and clear teaching has opened our eyes and hearts to the realisation that our separate groups need each other to ensure the treasure of our contemplative tradition is available not just to a few, but to all who are hungry. He and the Spirit have awakened our creative spirit and energies. The recent past gives credence to those words of our poet, James Macaulay:

*'Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,
Cast flame upon the earth: raise up contemplatives
Among us, men (women) who walk within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.*

Set pools of silence in this thirsty land:

...

*Prayer has an influence we cannot mark,
It works unseen like radium in the dark.*

*A consummation devoutly to be desired!*¹

We are blessed to live in a time that is witnessing the restoration of contemplation in the life of the ordinary Christian and seeker. Bruno Barnhardt, the Camaldolese monk in Big Sur, (California) has said something like this, "For the past 400 years we in the West have lived in a sapiential vacuum cut off from the roots of our own contemplative tradition"; but, he continues, "The sleeping seeds of our own contemplative tradition are being awakened along an Eastern frontier".² He cites the prophetic lives of Thomas Merton, Bede Griffiths, Abhishiktananda, and Ramon Pannikar. Thomas Keating agrees. He says, "*There is a hunger for a deeper experience of prayer and some kind of community support system that is manifesting itself right across the line of parishes, religious life, priests, but most of all in lay people.*"³

We are blessed to be part of this hunger. Our desire to form something similar to Contemplative Outreach USA is motivated principally, I believe, by what Fr. Keating calls 'a community support system'. Again, may I say, we are blessed to be at the spearhead of his movement that seeks to give glory to God and sustenance to those we serve.

In saying this I only wish to honour the dignity and grace of the occasion.

I would like to move now from this point of rediscovery of our wisdom tradition and the precise purpose of our presence together to the inner beauty and the Absolute Reality we seek in our contemplation: the glory of God! We all know of that golden moment in the life of Thomas Morton when he stood on the corner of 4th and Walnut Street in Louisville, waiting for the light to turn green. It was a moment that radically changed his life. He saw the glory of God in each of his fellow citizens: 'If they only knew they had faces shining like the sun!'

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This is the Holy Grail we are all in pursuit of. We know we can do nothing to achieve it. Merton says, "*I have no program for this seeing; it is only given. But the Gate of Heaven is everywhere.*"⁴

This is the pearl of great price! It is what the Christian East describes as 'the deep heart'. This fires me with a great desire to be a servant at the awakening of this moment in another. This knowledge and some experience of this reality inspires us to invite our fellow travellers to join us in this pursuit. It is for the Glory of God and no other. It is a call beyond the ego or false self to the place of self-transcendence. I see this, at the deepest level, as the service of Centering Prayer: this acknowledging the presence of God within and surrendering to God's loving action within: to come home to our own true hearts! As Abhishiktanada has written, "The heart is the place of our origin in which the soul, as it were, coming from the hands of God, wakes up to itself."

I believe our interest in contemplative prayer and its promotion through the practice of centering prayer is so more and more women, men and children, may awaken to the God who dwells within; and in doing so to realise the beauty of their own souls. Bede Griffiths writes, "To discover God is not to discover an idea but to discover oneself. It is to awake to that part of one's existence which

has been hidden from sight and which one has refused to recognise."

In the final pages of his diary, Abhishiktananda writes, "After some days there came to me, as if it were the marvellous solution to an equation: I have found the Holy Grail; and that is what I keep saying and writing to anyone who can grasp the figure of speech. The quest for the Grail is basically nothing else than the quest for the Self; a simple quest that is the meaning of all the myths and symbols. It is yourself that you are seeking through everything"⁵ And we only find our true-selves in God.

This is at the heart of our time together. This is at the heart of what we wish to do for the glory of God and for the service of our fellow brothers and sisters. Let me finish with the beautiful Byzantine prayer that Fr. William Meninger introduced us to in November:

*Serene Light, shining in the
Ground of my being
Draw me to yourself,
Draw me past the snares of the senses, Out of
the mazes of the mind;
Free me from symbols, from words, That I
may discover
The Signified, The Word Unspoken in the
darkness that veils the ground of my being.
Amen.*

Frank Gerry SVD
Member of the Society of the Divine Word

1. Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry, selected by Les A. Murray, (Collins Dove 1986) p.173

2. Cf. Purity of Heart and Contemplation, edited by Joseph Wong and Bruno Barnhart Continuum 2001

3. Thomas Keating, taped conference

4. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, (London, Burns & Oates 1968), p. 140

5. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, (I.S.P.C.K, 1998) p. 386).