



CONTEMPLATIVE
NETWORK

The Carceri

To deepen prayer life through contemplation



Contemplation and movement

Lord God of all stillness and ground of our sure repose.

To Whom all tumult bows in reverent adoration, at Your quiet Word.

Grant trust in Your timing as all creation longingly awaits Your peace.

May emptied hands paused, and at rest, worship and glorify Your name.

May quiescent minds hear the nuanced beauty of Your silent river of love.

Whose flood washes away each tear, in Your all powerful tranquillity.

All honour, dominion, majesty are Yours, our gracious Rock and Redeemer.

As at Your mighty Word, Your will is done on earth and in heaven, Amen.



CONTEMPLATIVE
NETWORK

The **Contemplative Network** was formed in 1999 (it was originally named the 'Solitaries Network'). The object of the Network is to provide support for those tertiaries who felt called to a more contemplative way of following Francis. As followers of St Francis and St Clare we are called to be both contemplative and active, but the Third Order acknowledges that some will be more drawn to the contemplative way, and others to a more active way.

To support those called to a more contemplative way, the Network publishes a magazine, recently re-named 'THE CARCERI', twice a year. The CARCERI contains articles about contemplation, contributions by members of the Network, e.g. poetry and photographs, and book recommendations.

Members of the Network also receive an Intercession List and are asked to pray for five or six members every day of the month. This also gives members the opportunity to link up with those who live in their Area, if they wish.

**God, our Father,
whose most dear Son was radiantly
transfigured in the sight of His disciples
before He suffered death on the cross;
and who went to quiet places to spend time
alone with you to renew His strength before
going to meet human need;
grant us, in our day, glimpses of your glory,
that we may be envisioned and empowered
to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.
Help us not to want to remain
on the mountain,
but to go with our Lord Jesus to the plain,
to serve You and all of Your children.
This we ask through the same Jesus Christ,
our risen, ascended, and glorified Saviour.
Amen.**

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The CARCERI and the Intercession List are produced by the Steering Group.

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EDITORIAL

The hard-backed copy of The Carceri magazine that was produced specially for our 800th-year celebration of the Third Order was such a success that we decided to print this edition as a hard copy as well. It achieved two important objectives. First, as a contribution to our celebrations, but also as a way of reaching everyone in TSSF and beyond. A hard copy can be passed on and enjoyed by others.

It can be a small way of helping to make our Lord known and loved everywhere.

I am writing this as we approach Advent. The coming of Jesus into the world. What a glorious and mysterious time this is. It is like planting a bulb in the earth and waiting for it to emerge into the world and grow into a beautiful flower to enrich all who see it. It is cold, it is dark, the wind is blowing, it wants to rain again, and nature is closing down for its long winter's contemplative sleep.

But buried beneath the surface, the bulb grows unseen. It feels a bit like this producing an edition of The Carceri Magazine. We dig away in the dark, planting ideas to see if they will grow and flourish.

We put things together, and then in the Spring, the result of many people's contributions comes out. A magazine that aims to glorify God in contemplation and movement which provides us with a conundrum. If contemplation is about sitting still, 'Be still and know that I am God', how can any movement be involved?



Bruce Driver

We have lived through a turbulent, fast-moving year with a revolving door of political leaders spinning in and out of power. We have all been embroiled in the effects of a catastrophic war that has been changing everyone's lives worldwide. We are moving inexorably towards an ecological tipping point that is already having far-reaching consequences on the way we live. The future is full of uncomfortable uncertainties. It would be nice to see The Carceri Magazine as a panacea that can solve all our problems. Sit down, relax, empty the mind, close down for the winter, and all will become bearable. Well, that is a prelude to answering our discomfort, but if that is the be-all and end-all of contemplation, it leaves us with a vacuum that is quickly filled with an even greater sense of dis-ease. Remember the story of the man who sweeps his house clear of devils only to find his house invaded by seven more powerful devils? If contemplation is to have any value, it must be coupled with movement. Unless we allow contemplation to blossom into action, we are liable to fail in fulfilling our potential. When daffodils don't produce any flowers, they are called 'blind'. Contemplation allows us to 'see'. How can you practice stillness and expect movement to be the result? It's a bit like the Koan riddle, 'How do you release a goose from a bottle with a neck that isn't wide enough to allow the goose to escape without breaking the bottle?' You have to experience the reason the goose is in the bottle in the first place before you can understand how it can escape. You must experience the reason you are sitting in stillness before you can understand how it is linked with movement. This edition of The Carceri explores Contemplation and Movement. We hope it will help you resolve the conundrum.

*Paul Alexander TSSF
Chairperson of the Contemplative Network
Steering Group*

Contemplation and Movement

by Tony Ross TSSF

There is movement into contemplation and movement out of contemplation, but contemplation itself is the stillness of body and mind.

Consider how Jesus prepared for the prayer of stillness and the action that followed his contemplation.

Luke 6:12-13 Jesus Chooses the Twelve Apostles

“Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.”

Mark 1:35-39 A Preaching Tour in Galilee

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”



Julie Thomas

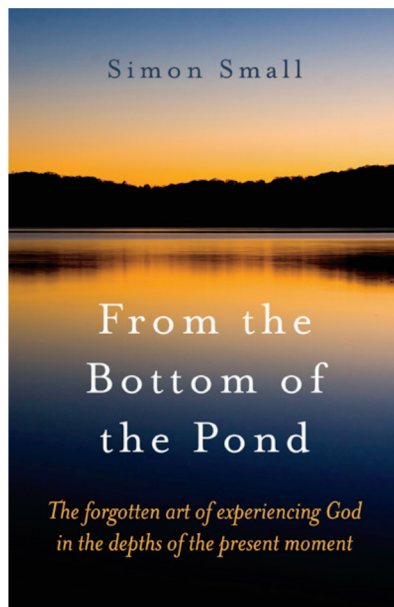
In both instances, Jesus prepares for his time alone with God by seeking out a solitary place or by climbing a mountain. One imagines him sitting in silence, communing with God the Father. After his time of contemplation, he returns from the place of solitude or descends the mountain, moving into action: calling the Twelve Apostles or proclaiming his message.

Consider how Francis prepared for the prayer of stillness and the action that followed his contemplation.

Francis sought out lonely places to be alone with God. He would climb the muddy pathway from Assisi to the Hermitage, four miles northeast of Assisi, and there, spend long periods of silence in one of the grottoes. He would return to Assisi and continue his ministry of caring for the lepers and preaching a gospel of penance. He would often spend forty days in retreat, for example, a Lent retreat alone on a small island on Lake Trasimeno. Another favourite place for Francis was the the mountain retreat of La Verna, where he received the Stigmata.

Both Jesus and Francis moved to a place of silence and solitude before spending time alone with God, after which they returned to an active ministry. A movement into and out of contemplation, but the contemplation itself was that quiet time alone with God in silence and stillness. So it is for those who practice contemplation today. The movement into or preparation for contemplation may take different forms: finding a special place, walking the labyrinth, sacred dance or looking at the beauty of nature and so on. This preparation leads to silence and stillness, and openness to God, using a simple mantra to stop the mind's wandering. After the silence of contemplation we return to the world and action, doing God's will.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:11



FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE POND

Simon Small

The title for this short book of just under eighty pages is in part explained by its subtitle 'The forgotten art of experiencing God in the depths of the present moment. Both title and subtitle will enrich the reader prepared to spend time meditating on their meaning.

There is a wealth of rich observations to be gathered from this book which can be used as meditation points to lead one into the realm of contemplation. The book is deceptively simple to read as if a pond is no great lake or as if a pond is shallow and a lake is deep. The size and depth of this book is in fact limitless. One reviewer has said: 'read it (this book) and read it again'. They could have added, 'again and again'. It will certainly continue to reveal hidden depths each time you read it as though you are immersing yourself deeper and deeper into the present moment. In reality, its message is very simple. But the simplest things can sometimes be the most difficult to grasp. And the simplest things often have a sting in the tail as this book points out. Contemplation is not for the faint hearted. At some point contemplation will reveal yourself to yourself. If contemplation is then to be of value this revealing truth must be encompassed until 'This insight brings with it a deep experience of love. It is the richest of moments. A life can never be the same again.' With which the book ends.

Julie Thomas



*God of endless power and might
you spoke to your servant Elijah,
not in wind and fire, but in the still small voice, the gentle
whisper,
draw us to worship you in stillness and silence.
Call us to yourself in all the glory of your creation both loud
and soft.
May we find you in the harmonies of music and in the
dance of the stars and the planets.
In the freedom of the sunlight and the shadows in the air,
may we feel your presence.
Exhilarate us in the roar and rush of wind and waves.
Satisfy us with the companionship of good friends and
keep us safely in your hands O God the maker of all
things.
Guide us day by day, following in the footsteps of Francis
our brother
and of Jesus your son . Amen*

A FRANCISCAN PRAYER

Source of Love,
Bring us to life and we will proclaim your praise.
From the rising of the sun, till its setting
Your glory is proclaimed throughout the world.
You have set us free to worship you without fear,
Full of integrity for creation, justice and peace.
Jesus Christ,
We praise you here and everywhere,
Now and always.
By your life and death,
you have redeemed the world.
We pray for the Society of Saint Francis,
In its desire to make you known
and loved everywhere,
In its desire to treat all creation as family,
And in its desire to live simply.
Through lives devoted to contemplative prayer,
Meditative study,
And active service.
In the spirit of living humbly close to the earth,
Being in love with all creation,
And joining in all the ups
and downs of life with joy.
Thank you for the spirit of Francis,
May we be brought together
in community and prayer,
To glorify you,
After the example of Brother Francis
and Sister Clare,
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

FRANCISCAN CONTEMPLATION 1:

St. Francis of Assisi

by John-Francis Friendship TSSF

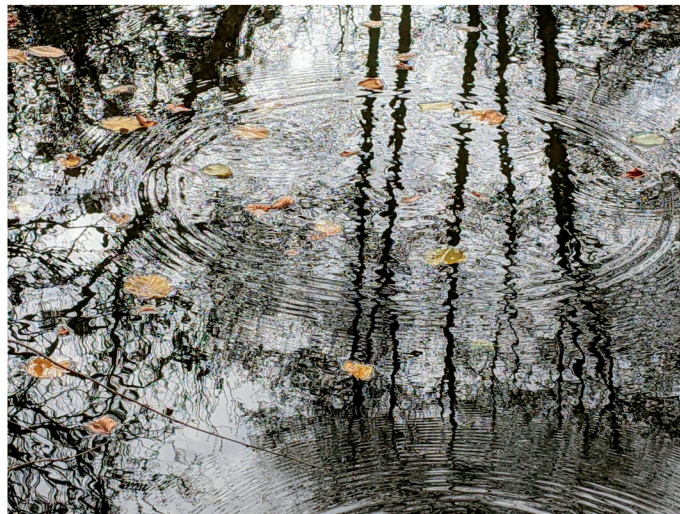
In her great work, *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill (the important early 20th century writer on the spiritual life) describes contemplation as 'infused with burning love, for it seems to its possessors to be primarily a movement of the heart' (p.50). Most of us have learned to trust our five animal senses (sight, hearing etc.) because they enable us to live, but there are depths known only through that 6th sense lying within our unconscious heart - that sense enabling awareness of the divine.

In the last edition of the *Carceri* Br. Nicholas Alan pointed out that Francis rarely spoke about 'contemplation' but various writings give insights into his practice. What seems clear is the way they were all Christ-centred - even his 'contemplation' of nature looked beneath the outer forms to see Christ present in all creation. As Thomas of Celano (1185-1260), an early friar and author of three hagiographies of Francis, wrote:

'Who could ever express the deep affection Francis bore for all things that belong to God? Or . . . tell of the sweet tenderness he enjoyed while contemplating in creatures the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator?'

After, his death, St. Bonaventure said in his *Major Life of St Francis*, IX:1:

'In everything beautiful, (Francis) saw him who is beauty itself, and he followed his Beloved everywhere by his likeness imprinted on creation; of all creation he made a ladder by which he might mount up and embrace Him who is all-desirable'



Julie Thomas

As a consequence some regard Francis as 'the first materialist' - he was certainly a sacramentalist which his love of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament makes clear. This is to be seen in the opening of his *Admonitions* and other writings - for example, in his *Letter to All Clerics* he wrote that, "in this world there is nothing of the Most High himself that we can possess and contemplate with our eyes, except his Body and Blood." Then, towards the end of this life (1224 or 1225) he famously wrote:

"O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God, should humble himself like this and hide under the form of a little bread, for our salvation." (Letter to all the Friars)

continue...

Thomas of Celano (1185-1260), an early friar and author of three hagiographies of Francis, wrote in *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* (the 'fioretti') that the saint 'burned with a love that came from his whole being for the sacrament of the Lord's body.' Chapter 26 provides an account of Brother John of La Verna who, after saying Matins with the other brothers during the octave of the Assumption of Our Lady, went on to sing the Mass. During his preparation he 'contemplated with much joy the words of consecration of the body of Christ', that is 'Hoc est corpus meum (this is my body)'. When he came to say the words his love became so great that he could get no further than saying "*Hoc est enim (For this is) ... constantly repeating them. Finally, he was able to complete the words of institution ... corpus meum (my body)*" which he said 'in a loud voice' ... 'immediately the form of the bread disappeared, and in the host appeared the blessed Jesus Christ incarnate and glorified, and he was wrapped out of himself ... '

Next time we'll consider contemplation in the writings of St. Clare of Assisi.

**Jacopone da Todi, (1230s)
Third Order Mystic**

Writer of devotional poems known as *laude* or 'lauds' expressing passionate love of God in own language. Common themes include 'the ecstatic love of God manifest in his self-emptying into human flesh, the madness of God-in-Christ suffering on the cross for ungrateful humanity, the annihilating effect of divine love in the soul who does respond to it.

*I know well, O highest wisdom,
that if I am mad, it is your doing -
this dates from day
I surrendered myself to love,
laid aside my old self and out on you
and was drawn - I know not how - to new life.*

Franciscans Footprints - Helen Julian CSF

Redwing Born Advent Night
by David Bagott

Redwing borne Advent night,
When darkness arrives,
Before the day is done.

And the cold of a World,
At war with itself.
Our own existence entangled,
In grief of our making.
And that imposed.

When kingdom come,
Has come, yet still to come.
We are waiting, and wondering,
And watching in the deepness,
Of eternal contradictions.

The birth that happened,
Gave all, and light.
This darkness broken,
And we in darkness remain,
Though light we have.

**Lord God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
our companion on the journey of faith;
allow us in the silence to behold you
and in our beholding to draw close to you,
the ground of our being and love of our life,
for with you is the well of life
and in your light shall we see light.***

Amen

The Body at the Heart of Prayer

by Jennifer M. Fox Eades TSSF MSTAT

God loves bodies. God nestled in a woman's body for 9 months, suckled from a breast and stretched out his little hands and feet. God touched the wood and the tools he worked with. Spat in the mud and wiped it on a blind man's eyelids. Washed his disciples' dirty feet and let a woman wash his own. God left us bread and wine to eat and drink in communion with him so we taste the Divine on our lips. God endured bodily destruction for love of us and on the third day spoke tender words to those who waited for him and breathed on them God's life, God's spirit.

The Alexander technique, best known as a way of helping bad backs, is a delicate contemplative discipline that helps us be more aware of our bodies, of the sacred gift of our embodied selves. It is through our fleshly, earthy bodies, our physical selves that we encounter the Divine and the more aware of those selves we become the more we can pay gentle attention to the Christ, miraculously indwelling each cell, each bone, each particle of our being. And as we increase in our awareness of ourselves we may find we grow in compassion, for our own sacred, frail, beautiful humanness and for other humans and all other-kind.

Cynthia Bourgeault says that spiritual practice at its simplest is learning to soften and open and yield, rather than brace, harden or resist. I don't see that as some kind of ethereal spiritual teaching but as a very practical and physical truth that applies first to our bodies.

So my practical, Alexander informed prayer suggestion is that at the start of a prayer time, ask for the grace to increasingly notice when you harden and resist – and to let go of that, as well as letting go of thoughts. Notice how much tension there is as you sit in prayer – and just ask yourself gently for a little more softness. Do you hold yourself gently upright, or tense your shoulders? Can you yield to the support of the floor or the chair a touch more – not collapsing totally in a slump but being gently open and alert?

And then, because contemplation is more than our sitting prayer time, can you take that gentle awareness of yourself – and therefore of the Divine embodied in you – into a walk? Can you literally walk more gently, noticing the support and feel of the ground as you walk, noticing the feel of air on your skin and being gently open to what you see, hear, encounter, notice – letting the world come to you through the blessing of your senses?

Finally, consider self-touch as a kind of prayer. The Eastern art of Qi Gong teaches the value of this practice and it is worth exploring. Simply soften your dominant hand, as if you were holding a butterfly, then imagine the other hand is Christ gently holding, stroking, and cradling that hard-working dominant limb. Consider offering a few moments quietly appreciating the miracle of your hands as wordless prayer. God appreciates bodies. So should we.

Jennifer is a qualified teacher of the Alexander Technique. Her book, *Embodying Prayer: Exploring Franciscan spirituality with the Alexander Technique* will be published later this year by Christian Alternative Books.

Reference: Bourgeault, C., 2003. *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Contemplation and Movement

An inner journey with God through swimming, walking, and Tai Chi.

by Stuart Ballard TSSF

Each of these three activities can be a movement-based embodied contemplative practice (MECP). See 'Movement-based embodied contemplative practices: definitions and paradigms'. Schailzl, Crane-Godreau, & Payne. In 'Frontiers of Human Neuroscience' 14 Apr 2014.

A brief summary of the authors' understanding of an MECP :-

Movement-based = based on internally generated self-willed movement where participants guide and adjust their movement based on subtle feedback from joints and muscles.

Embodied = involves a complex interplay of brain, body and environment, and the seamless integration of interoceptive, proprioceptive, kinesthetic, tactile and special information.

Contemplative = Sustained attention and deep consideration of an object of interest that is often used in the context of religious or spiritual experience. (The authors use the dictionary definition which includes both secular and religious meanings, but their text gives it a more spiritual connotation.)

My journey began in 1963 with daily distance swimming and outdoor work. I was a nominal Christian unaware of God's presence and promptings. However, looking back I recognise that both swimming and walking can be MECPs requiring control of breath, movement and rhythm with, maybe, a mantra - 'In ... Out' swimming, and perhaps the 'Jesus Prayer' when walking!

Numerous internet articles mention contemplation whilst swimming and walking, and authors such as Thich Nhat Hahn deal extensively with walking-related contemplation and awareness practices.

Did Francis, with his awareness of nature and God, have an MECP as he went on his peripatetic way?

In 1990 I began an active Christian life, experiencing sedentary Christian contemplative practices.

Simultaneously, for the last 5 years, I have practised the Yang Form of Tai Chi, which is an MECP. In spite of the Yang Form originating as an oriental martial art, I saw it as a gentle form of expression to keep the body relaxed and supple, to improve balance, to slow down my pace of life, and to meet other people. It is a grounded/earthed practice that puts body, mind, and spirit into an equal balance. The fact that Tai Chi is practised standing up attracted me because getting up and down from the ground is now difficult!

However, Tai Chi is open to all; male/female, married/single, ordained/lay, young/old. Tai Chi movement names are evocative of peace and tranquillity, for example - 'Golden pheasant stands on one leg', 'Wave hands like clouds', 'Willow waves in the breeze', and 'Wind kisses lotus leaf'. The repetitive movements, regularly performed slowly, ensure that muscle-memory comes into play, freeing the mind for contemplation. However, I have yet to master this freedom because I still need to concentrate on coordinating my breathing, movement, flow and rhythm!

Nevertheless, having practised controlled breathing for years, I feel relatively competent using Christian mantras and breathing exercises, courtesy of Christian teachers such as De Mello, O'Leary, et al.

My journey with contemplation and movement continues. God being my helper.

The Labyrinth: movement into stillness

by Maureen CSF

Labyrinths have been known to the human race for more than 4,000 years. They seem to have emerged and re-emerged, capturing our interest in several time waves and in slightly different forms throughout time. Labyrinths have been found in places as diverse as China, India, the Americas and Southern Africa, and later, apparently independently of outside influences, were also drawn in the countries in the Baltic area and Scandinavia. They have been seen as rock carvings and paintings, ceramic inscriptions and using tiles as a pattern. The Romans were familiar with labyrinths, inscribing them on walls and as mosaic patterns on the floor – the mosaic ones were too small to walk, and the wall ones would only have been used as finger labyrinths. Roman remains in Britain have also revealed labyrinths; there was a labyrinth at Harpham, which is now in the Hull and East Riding Museum, and one at Caerleon in Newport, Gwent, which is now in the Caerleon Museum. For the most part, we have to guess as to the reason for the labyrinths, and not all seem to have had a religious purpose.

The key difference between a maze and a labyrinth is that the labyrinth has one entry point and no false leads, so by following the path, you will get to the centre. Mostly, the same path is followed to go out of the labyrinth, though some labyrinth styles have a short-cut route to exit it. The pattern itself has no special properties, it is not magical or spiritual, it is simply a path that has been made in the ground or drawn on the canvas.





The medieval period saw a new wave of labyrinth-building and design changes. A monk called Otfrid, in the late ninth century, added four extra circuits to the classical labyrinth design, thus making a more complex eleven-circuit labyrinth. He drew this pattern at the back of his Book of the Gospels, thus preserving it for future generations to play with. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, dozens of labyrinths were to be found in cathedrals and churches across Europe. They were a sort-of pastoral response to the desire of people to make a pilgrimage to Rome or the Holy Land, especially in order to gain an indulgence and so reduce their time in purgatory. Pilgrimages to the Holy Land were not possible for some time because the land was under Muslim leaders, and also travel overland in Europe was dangerous because of outlaws and brigands.

The most famous medieval labyrinth, the Chartres Labyrinth, was laid down in about 1201 in the nave of Chartres Cathedral, France. Others in France were at Sens (later destroyed), Poitiers, Bayeux, Amiens and Rheims, and in Italy, they were in the cathedrals in Lucca and San Maria-di-Trastavera in Rome. Some labyrinths can be walked in 5 minutes. A full-sized Chartres-style labyrinth is actually a very long way, with a walking time of at least half an hour altogether.

For me, the best way to walk a labyrinth is to walk it at a moderately slow pace, but for some people, a very slow pace is what suits them, and others will walk it quite quickly. As I approach the entry point of the labyrinth, I pause before stepping into the path, and ask Jesus to walk with me, perhaps also with reference to him accompanying the disciples to Emmaus, or perhaps saying the Jesus Prayer ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner'). If I continue with the words of the Jesus Prayer, it is not usually for long because of my focus on watching where I am walking.

At the centre of the labyrinth is a space to pause for as long as I like, and I often face the main points of the compass and pray for the world out from them, or simply take in what I feel and see and hear as I turn in the centre. So the walk into the centre is a physical thing, a rhythm of walking and slowing at the turns of the path. Because I don't have to make decisions about which path to take, as there are no dead ends or alternative routes into the centre, I simply follow the path, and my mind concentrates on doing that while also being freed of other distractions. For some people, walking the labyrinth has enabled something of tangled thoughts on a decision that needs to be made to become untangled and the way forward clear, or they have seen some particular aspect of their life in a new understanding. I appreciate the simple sense of becoming focused on God as the walking enables other distractions to drop away. Not that this is an ecstatic experience, simply a sense of being in the presence of God, as sometimes happens also at other times. Hence that sense of movement into stillness; the physical movement allows inner stillness.

The walk out of the labyrinth is at the same pace as that going in, and for me, there is simply a sense of relaxedness in Christ's presence as I walk the path. I pause after stepping out of the labyrinth to give thanks to God for the sense of movement that was in the walking and for the inner stillness and ask God to continue to walk with me for the rest of the day. It is an affirmative prayer rather than a necessary request, as I know that God is with me all the time, anyway, but as a friend said, it is helpful to 'pass it through the voice box'. I might also write a few words or phrases in my journal that reflect something of the experience of that particular labyrinth walk; every walk is different.

Like any spiritual discipline, walking a labyrinth, or tracing the path of a finger labyrinth, is an aid to contemplative prayer for some people and is of no help at all for others. Some people even feel nauseous trying to follow the path, as the lines get all jumbled up visually, making them dizzy, and they have to stop. I'm not very good at following a printed finger labyrinth, as I lose the path, and then I get frustrated; a grooved wooden finger labyrinth is helpful, though. I enjoy the contradiction of the concept of movement into stillness, as well as the physicalness of the rhythmic walking; and that sense of it being a mini-pilgrimage: a walk with a spiritual objective, and a way of renewing my being in God.

Contemplative Network Resource Information - ONLINE CONTEMPLATIVE OFFICES

If you are a member of the Contemplative Network, you might be interested in joining our online contemplative offices taking place every day. The link for joining is distributed with the intercession list.

We gather in silence at:

7:30 am - 8:00 am The Morning Office - online room opens at 7.20 am displaying 'A Franciscan Prayer', which is similar to the community obedience. At 7.30 am zoom reverts to mute and shuts down the video, so only people's names and background pictures are displayed.

1.00 pm - 1.30 pm for the Mid-Day Office

6.00 pm - 6.30 pm for the Evening Office

8 pm - Compline starts - For Compline are videos and pictures kept open, and people lead the liturgy.

You will be very welcome. The offices tend to attract a small group of people.

You don't have to do anything. The aim is to establish a regular rhythm of listening to and placing ourselves in the presence of God.

Pax et Bonum.

Meditation at the Abbaye de Bonnevaux

by John M Evans TSSF

For some time, I have been actively interested in meditation, as envisaged particularly by Martin Laird and by John Main, who inspired the foundation of the World Council for Christian Meditation. When I heard that WCCM has a new mother house, the Abbaye de Bonnevaux near Poitiers in France, I was keen to go there. I took the opportunity of joining in the "UK Pilgrimage" from 5th to 10th July 2022, with its theme of "Pleroma - the Fullness of God".

You can get a good idea of the Centre from their website, <https://bonnevauxwccm.org/>.

The current buildings trace their origin to a Twelfth Century Cistercian Abbey, which was partially demolished after the French Revolution and used as a private dwelling, before being converted to a Conference Centre over the past few years. It is now the home of a mixed community of people, some of whom are young people on working holidays abroad, living there with Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, the Director of WCCM. Their communal meditation, within a Benedictine framework, bears fruit in a strong sense of service and community.

The retreat I took part in followed the regular worship of the community. There are four sessions of 30 mins of meditation each day. Each is embedded in a simple service, taken at a slow, contemplative pace. There is also a daily Eucharist.

The services include three readings: one from the Bible; one from a Christian source, such as John Main; and one from a "sister tradition", such as Hinduism or Buddhism.

In addition, we had some instruction on simple yoga practices to aid us in relaxation and to sit well, and we listened to talks from Fr Laurence on "pleroma". Our food was mainly well-prepared vegetables. We stayed in simple but comfortable rooms, most of which had been fitted into the attic of an old stable block.

From a Franciscan point of view, the retreat was highly accessible. It was a delight to be with people from different backgrounds, and indeed countries, and to listen to extracts from the sacred writings of other faiths (notably the Upanishads). The silence of Bonnevaux is extraordinary. It is far away from main roads - indeed almost any roads - and the main sound is the wind in the fine trees of the large estate.

Overall, I thought this was a wonderful place to go for a meditation retreat, or indeed a private visit. I felt a strong sense of spiritual power there, which can only strengthen as it is continually prayed in. I hope it becomes a place of pilgrimage for many people seeing to deepen their practice of meditation.

Poitiers is quite a long way down into France and getting to the Abbey is not straightforward. If anyone from TSSF is interested in going there, do get in touch with me and I will be happy to advise you as best I can.

Abide, and go

Andrew D. Mayes

"I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant."
(John 15, Message)

John uses the word 'abide' no less than eleven times in chapter 15. The Greek word *meno* - here an imperative from the mouth of Christ - means stay, wait, linger, remain, stand your ground.

When you find yourself in a place of stillness, stay at it, don't wriggle - allow yourself to be held by God in the stillness. Enjoy and relish the communion with God. Savour his love lavished upon you (1 John 1).

"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..."

In the next breath, having given the imperative to stay still, Jesus goes on to command his disciples to move - to go and bear fruit. The disciples are to be "marturia". The word, of course, means witnesses, sharing one's first-hand experience of Christ with others, giving testimony, and giving rise to the word martyrs. Jesus is quite clear:

"Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends" (John 15:13, Message). We are being called to a Christ-like life: not only to abide in Christ as Christ abides in his Father (15:10) but, like him, to live sacrificially for others.

The experience of abiding and communion is a preparation for self-sacrifice. Grapes are not to be admired but crushed to release their goodness, or else they wither on the vine. Ephrem puts it, referring to Christ the Grape: "The Grape was pressed and gave the Medicine of Life to the Nations." [1]

We are not to luxuriate selfishly in a passive quietude. We are to position ourselves in a place where we can receive and drink in the love of Christ, which energizes us for courageous and risky ministry. We draw up the goodness and nutrients we need as we abide, but there must be a readiness for the blood of grapes to be spilt.

As we recall on Good Friday:

*"Why are your robes so red,
and your garments like theirs
who tread the wine press?"
"I have trodden the wine press alone...
juice spattered on my garments...
the year for my redeeming work had come."
(Isaiah 63:2-4)*

Abiding in the vine renews the love of Christ in us, that we may bear a fruit that needs to be crushed and squeezed before it can be received. "Love is measured by sacrifice." Francis himself realizes:

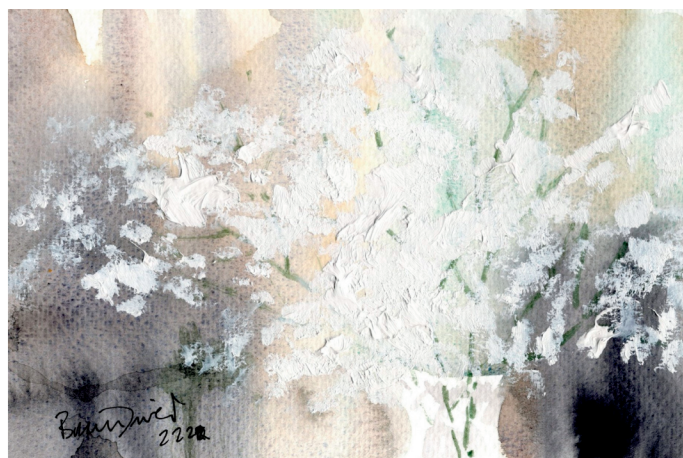
There is one thing ...that seems to outweigh all these considerations before God, that is, the only begotten Son of God, who is the highest wisdom, came down from the bosom of the Father for the salvation of souls in order to instruct the world by his example and to speak the word of salvation to people...holding back for himself absolutely nothing that he could freely give for our salvation. And because we should do everything according to the pattern shown us in him ...it seems more pleasing to God that I interrupt my quiet and go out to labour.[2]

The greatest challenge, of course, is not simply to alternate contemplation and movement but, like Jesus and Francis, to bring a listening heart into the centre of the action.

This extract from **Reforesting the Soul: meditating with trees**, will be published soon.

[1] "Hymns on Virginity 31:13" in Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom, 120.

[2] Bonaventure's "Major Legend of Saint Francis, ch.12" in Armstrong, Hellman & Short (eds.), Francis of Assisi Early Documents: Vol. 2, 622.



Bruce Driver



Why contemplation is important and how the 'Carceri' is helpful to my contemplative practice.

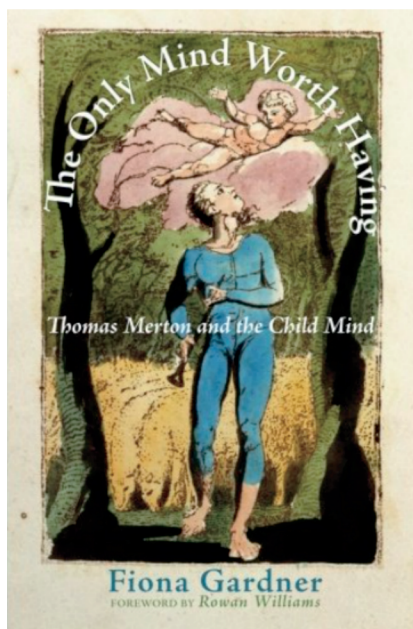
by David Austin TSSF, Mersey Valley

*In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.
Isaiah 30:15*

An Danish author tells the story of an old peasant who made an unusual request of his son as he lay dying. He asked his son to go into the best room of the house every day and sit there alone for half an hour. The son agreed to the strange request and promised his father he would do what he had been told. After his father's death, the son kept faithful to his promise. He did this unusual thing, spending a half an hour alone each day. At first the time of quiet and solitude was uncomfortable. He became restless and anxious for the time to end. But over the weeks, that half hour of solitude grew into a cherished and even transforming habit. The son looked forward to this brief quiet time each day and even began to thrive on it. He began to experience deep and calming changes within himself.

Are you willing to be alone for half an hour a day? Are you will to take an adventure of expectant faith, not looking for a predefined experience, not seeking an emotional high, but asking Jesus to come to you in His own way? With your body relaxed and comfortable, and looking only to Jesus, your heart will be turned to Him in adoration. From this experience, you are likely to have a greater desire to obey Him. People who devote time to be alone with the Lord find a renewed reservoir of personal strength and quiet confidence.

The world desperately needs people who are trying out Jesus' way of life and have an ever-deepening experience of Him. They are looking for peace and joy that lasts, and those qualities only show up in the lives believers who allow Jesus to reign in their hearts. Spend some peaceful moments alone with the Lord today and watch the peace and joy in your heart grow and spill over into the lives of others.

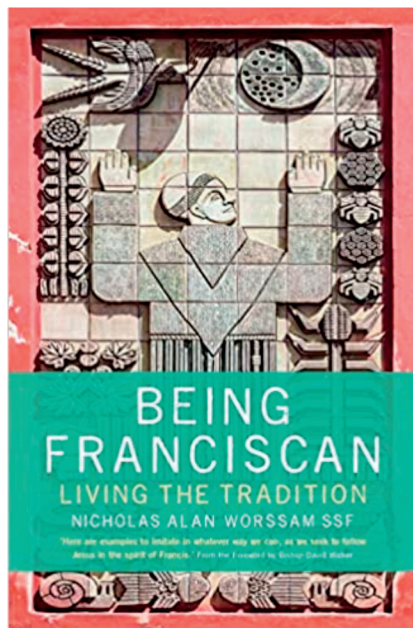


THE ONLY MIND WORTH HAVING - THOMAS MERTON AND THE CHILD MIND

by Fiona Gardner

I think St Francis would feel much resonance with Fiona Gardener's book, The Only Mind Worth Having, Thomas Merton and the Child Mind. St Francis was a wonderful example of what Fiona Gardener calls "uncovering, discovering, recognising, and then integrating the eternal child - the Christ child -- who is present and within the psyche of everyone." Through the writings of Thomas Merton as well as psychological research, Fiona helps us to understand how important Jesus's words, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3), are to the journey towards spiritual maturity.

Emily Miller TSSF



BEING FRANCISCAN – LIVING THE TRADITION

by Br Nicholas Alan SSF

For anyone interested in understanding something of the rich treasury of early Franciscan spirituality – or who want to look into the wealth of Christian spirituality generally – this book offers a series of wonderful vignettes into the lives of various Franciscan holy men and women.

Br. Nicholas Alan draws on his extensive knowledge of this genre, and a wealth of experience gained from many years as a Franciscan, to offer insights into the ways people have been drawn by the 'Little Poor Man of Assisi' and been inspired to give expression to their own calling in Christ. He writes in an accessible, straightforward way, quoting from a variety of early Franciscan sources, in order to explore how they can illuminate the way of Christ for us.

John-Francis Friendship TSSF

Faith and Belief

by David Bagott

In our perplexity, We are shaken,
Like Autumn leaves,
To the ground,
Where humus becoming,
Faith nurturing death,
In life arises.

Hard held belief,
That never falls,
Or fails,
Cannot not grow,
Or open out,
To the love flow,
It claims to hold.

In the God created,
Earthy darkness,
Son warmed,
Deeply connected,
There emerges,
Something of what,
We are meant to be.

'A Reflection on Contemplation'

St. Francis was pulled in two directions for a while – whether to spend his time in silence mainly and quiet adoration, or to pursue his work of preaching and reaching out into the world at large. Sister Clare and Brother Sylvester helped him come to the conclusion that it was the latter he should concentrate on. This did not mean he would give up contemplation as we know he spent much time on Mount Subasio and at La Verna. I and many others have felt the same tension between these things. For me a balance between the two has become essential and in this the Carceri unites me with other brothers and sisters who feel drawn to be still and wait on God. As I get older I am not able to be as active as I was, but the way of contemplation helps me to remain focused on my Lord and just BE.

Pax et bonum,
David Norwood TSSF

**Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Your servant Francis, closely following the example of his Lord and ours,
Your beloved Son Jesus Christ, withdrew to lonely places for prayer and contemplation
before engaging in active ministry, and who was, on La Verna,
sanctified by You with the marks of Your Son's passion;
As we seek to follow our father Francis, in devotion to You,
inspire our hearts, minds and souls, as we contemplate Your glory,
to rejoice in Your love, to understand Your will and purposes,
and to serve You faithfully in the world.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

Amen.

A Joyful Celebration of Contemplation for All

Paul Alexander TSSF
thirty daily blogs of

Meditative Thoughts from Bullaven Hermitage



A JOYFUL CELEBRATION OF CONTEMPLATION FOR ALL

by Paul Alexander TSSF

A Joyful Celebration of Contemplation for All, set against the brooding background of Dartmoor, certainly has a sense of Joy for all who want to practice contemplation as the thirty blogs leads the reader into contemplation through the imaginary characters of Meander, Ramble, Amble and Dawdle, which are 'the exterior signs of a contemplative life.'

These are followed by Awake, Aware, Alive and Alert which are the supplements 'we need to add to our way of life if we want to be involved in a joyful celebration of a contemplative life.' In the second half of the book, Paul meditates on the riches to be gained from contemplation. In addition, there are photographs and poetry to inspire the reader. If you have not used these meditative blogs yet, I recommend you try them.

Tony Ross TSSF

AVAILABLE TO BUY AT TSSF ONLINE SHOP - TSSF.ORG.UK



Theme of next edition:
**"What is unique about
the Franciscan contemplative way?"**

If you would like to contribute to the magazine with an article, poetry, photographs or art, please send your entry to the Chairman, Paul Alexander, at plalexander@yahoo.com before 31st July 2023



**Gently golden
oak leaves fall silent as snowflakes,
set free by last night's frost.**

**Settling into silence,
No need of reading now
Looking is enough.
Delicate pink pearl
in a nest of yellow leaves
vibrant with autumn.**

by Julie Thomas



CONTEMPLATIVE
NETWORK