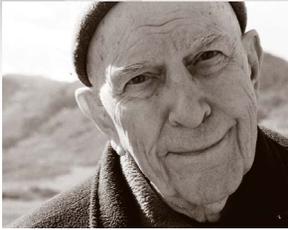




# God and the New Science



THOMAS KEATING

*Our Beloved Thomas Keating, although no longer with us, taught us the surrender to silence that is God's first language but also followed the footprints of God in the sciences, helping us to realize that the spiritual journey is meant to open us to the oneness of God with all creation and especially the human family. I know that Fr. Thomas wants us to continue the great adventure.*

*Bonnie J. Shimizu, retired assistant to Fr. Thomas Keating*

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**T**he striking discoveries of contemporary science are continually telling us new things about how material creation came to be and how it continues to evolve. Although we do not have all the answers, we are clearly going in a direction that transcends the cosmology in which the great world religions came into existence. Our vision, understanding, and our attitudes about God inevitably must change.

With this new information, many people, especially scientists, are uneasy with certain scriptural passages. They were written in a cosmological consciousness that is no longer possible to accept from a scientific viewpoint. This alerts us to the fact that we are living in a period of time that is axiomatic; that is, it is shifting into a state of awareness that will deeply affect our own consciousness and eventually the global community itself.

The new cosmology invites us to perceive evolution as God's way of carrying out the creative process. Things, events, and all of nature are not happening as a result of this or that particular cause, but by the

combination of a wide variety of causes in harmony with each other. Some creatures have natures that are mostly fixed, like plants and animals. They have to compete for life-sustaining resources with other instinctual creatures who are all trying to grow, nourish, and reproduce themselves.

When humans appear on the ladder of evolutionary complexity, God takes an enormously adventurous step. He gives to this one species of animal, evolved on the planet over billions of years, the power of free choice within certain limits. Free choice is not the same as freedom itself, which is who God is, and which in our case, is to give the right response in every situation spontaneously and without reflecting.

“God created us knowing that we would be a work in progress aimed at becoming fully human and capable of becoming participants in the divine nature.”

God respects our freedom and even lets us think up plans for how creation might be organized to better suit our particular needs and desires.

Another factor in the evolutionary process is chance. With regard to humans, science has proven that the human brain is plastic and that we can change our behaviors, attitudes, and habitual dispositions. If we don't succeed, it is primarily because we make many poor choices. Why be surprised? God created us knowing that we would be a work in progress aimed at becoming fully human and capable of becoming participants in the divine nature.

In our present evolutionary development as humans we have become conscious of the entire cosmos and of ourselves as never before. It is a participation in the divine intelligence measured to our limitations. God wills us to enjoy, appreciate, and embrace this life with all its possibilities and potentials and to trust him.

The eyes of faith however, have not yet been sufficiently awakened in us to enable us to perceive the divine presence in everything that exists and that happens. Teilhard de Chardin taught that every subatomic particle is filled with Christ. We consist of trillions of particles put together in a certain order by God or by the natural forces that God created. In either case, we are saturated with the divine.

Creation as we know it today is in a very different state than it was a trillionth of a second after the Big Bang. What is to prevent it from being equally new when the evolving human mind has had a chance to assimilate and react to further scientific discoveries? ☩

# THE FOURTH CONSENT: TRANSFORMATION

PATRICIA JOHNSON & DENIS SHEEHAN



*Editor's note: Pat Johnson has been the interim administrator for Contemplative Outreach for 2017 and 2018. In July 2018, Denis Sheehan was hired as the new administrator and the two have been working together during the transition.*

**D**enis and I were inspired to collaborate on writing this article as outgoing and incoming administrators. I remember so well Thomas Keating's statement on the fourth consent: "You would think people would be gung-ho to this consent, until they realize what this consent means."

What it means to me is consenting to service, where in every step of the way, the false self is seen in utter clarity and then I can respond by taking action to change that reality into a more God-like self, i.e. the true self that resides hidden under the wounds, the protection, all the created images that prop us up when we are still too vulnerable to surrender.

As I look at my own journey, first and foremost a huge THANK YOU arises for all the forces and all the persons that came into my life to help in that process of transformation, one that will not end until my final breath. Thank you to my husband who has put up with me and supported me in this journey; to my children who have, with humor and perseverance, been in my face to teach me humility and wisdom; Thomas who recognized me and brought me forth and transmitted by osmosis his knowledge of this particular Christian journey to transformation; all the retreatants who I have sat with in the laundry room, outside on the portal of the retreat center, on phone conversations, and on long walks both in Snowmass and in Amarillo over the many years; to the many staff persons I have worked closely with since 1984, particularly Fr. Charlie, Mary

Ann Matheson, Sherry Dutelle, Jennie Curtis, Nick Cole, Carol DiMarcello and David Frenette. All these persons contributed mightily to my growing by being mirrors for me. Those mirrors reflected to me that we are indeed not separate. We are not separate. We are not separate. We walk in nakedness and in unity with one another. Most of all we learn to love big, to respect, to appreciate, and to give our whole self away with abandon only to receive it all back in abundance. Thank you all for being a part of my particular universe.

Since writing this article, both Fr. Thomas and Fr. Joseph Boyle, our abbot, have passed into their transcendent life. Closely traveling this passage with them gave me glimpses of where they were going and what they were letting go of, primarily attachments connected to intimacy. Even so, the vastness of where they were heading was calling them. What an amazing experience for me to sit in silence with Joseph and in conversation with Thomas and be allowed to visualize the end phases of the letting go process. ☉

## Pat Johnson

**B**efore writing about this consent, I feel the need to elaborate on the process of getting there, wherever "there" is. Nearly 10 years ago I was given a copy of Fr. Thomas' book *Open Mind, Open Heart* from a friend. He actually was more of an acquaintance than a friend, so this gift exchange was completely out of the ordinary for the both of us. In reflection it was Spirit-led.

While reading *Open Mind, Open Heart* I began my practice of Centering Prayer and something deeper than my normal state of being began to surface. My identity at that time was largely based on my achievements — the job, the education, the material possessions — all these things I believed reflected who I had become. The fruits of Centering Prayer began to reveal the emptiness of this identity and put me in touch with a deep yearning for something more meaningful. This revelation had many facets to it, the first being that an identity founded on accomplishments

was entirely based on the approval of others. As this became clearer, I realized that this formula for living was very flawed. So, if my identity is not based on accomplishments, then what is it based on?

The silence in Centering Prayer seemed to be putting distance between my self-made identity and something or someone unfamiliar to me. What was being revealed was the self I had been trying to cover up with accomplishments since I was a young boy. My need for achieving reflected my attitude toward my basic goodness, which I didn't believe in. Fr. Thomas suggests that the natural order of one's self-acceptance occurs around 1 – 11 years of age; mine seemed to occur in my 50's.

The second consent is where we consent to our participation in the world and in relationships, activating and exercising our gifts and talents. This was something I used to get ahead in this world. I generally get along well with others, and this has been a saving grace as I developed a family system and a career. But I had a tendency to use relationships in a self-serving manner. The process of Centering Prayer has helped me to accept my basic goodness, outside of the approval of others. As I value and accept my God-given identity, my need for the approval of others lost its importance.

By this time, I believed I was nearing the third consent of diminishment, of non-being. I retired and was no longer needed by my work community; my children were grown and self-sufficient; and even my wife, family and friends would be fine if I were to leave this world. It wasn't a morbid feeling, just a realization that no one was dependent on me any longer. To tell the truth, it was a freeing realization.

What happened next was that I prayed. I was feeling the emptiness of my existence and I asked God to fully use me with all my experience, skills and talents. For the first time in my life, I wanted to do something that contributed to the spiritual wellbeing of others. I wasn't looking for a job; I wanted to spend the rest of my time contributing to something that I personally deemed meaningful.

When Contemplative Outreach began the recruitment process for the administrator's position, I forwarded the position notification to a friend in my local Centering Prayer group. Coincidentally, this person was on the search committee and instead encouraged me to consider applying. I then asked myself if I had a good reason not to apply, and now here I am.

So, for me, the consent to be transformed doesn't just happen at the end of our lives, but rather every time we experience the death of one season of life while moving toward another. The seasons of transformation have occurred many times throughout my life and I suspect they will continue for as long as I live.

Recently the Contemplative Outreach community has witnessed the passing of our co-founder, Fr. Thomas Keating, as well as Fr. Joseph Boyle, abbot of St. Benedicts Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado. Fr. Thomas was, and is, my spiritual teacher and I will always remember Fr. Joseph as the physical expression of the love of Christ. I am grateful to say they both remain with me today. Fr. Thomas was fond of saying, "The seed needs to die before growth can occur;" I can only imagine that with his passing, the movement of Centering Prayer and the community that supports it will increase. Fr. Thomas and Fr. Joseph fully received their lives, gave all they had to the communities they served, then let it all go upon God's call, fully embracing both the third and fourth consents.

My teachers have shown me the way to live effectively in communion with the Spirit. I have been encouraged to pray often, serve where needed, and trust the outcome to God. Now by the grace of God it is my turn to assume the role of servant leader – to do what I can, for whom I can, and when the time is right, let it all go. ☩

Peace to you and yours always,

**Denis Sheehan**

"So, for me, the consent to be transformed doesn't just happen at the end of our lives, but rather every time we experience the death of one season of life while moving toward another."

*While Fr. Thomas was in hospice in Spencer, Massachusetts, Ken Wilber sent him the following letter:*

## Dearest Father Thomas,

I've been following your illness as it progresses, and, with so many others, am just distraught at the possibility of your passing on. We're both spiritual seekers enough to realize that this won't be an end for you, but simply a transition to yet further journeys with God. But I wanted to tell you, before you take off on that journey, what an extraordinary presence you have been in my life, and literally almost every day since we first met. I can still vividly see the time that Treya brought me to the monastery in Snowmass for the first time; I noticed copies of *Up from Eden* on several shelves, and knew this would be an unusually intimate relationship for me. Over the years, the enthusiasm that you displayed for my work has been a constant source of inspiration for me, and always helped me believe I was on the right track. Likewise, the work that you were doing—in everything from the Snowmass inter-spiritual dialogues to your own work in Centering Prayer and the many contemplative communities around the world that you started—have always influenced me directly in my own spiritual growth and understanding. Whenever I was asked to name a genuine Christian saint, the first words out of my mouth were always, “Why, Father Thomas Keating, of course. And by the way, he’s still on this planet.”

Which is why the thought of your passing is just devastating to me. Yes, I'm delighted for the joyous journey ahead of you, but am also heartbroken at the loss for me and for so many. There will simply be noticeably and considerably less light on this planet when you have moved on, and all of us will feel that sadly and deeply. I notice that, over the years, I came more and more to see you as embodying that figure of Jesus Christ that I had put in *Up from Eden*, representing the evolution of all humanity toward their own Ground and Source. You are still the holiest person that I have ever met—seriously—and I have met quite a few. I know your own humility would not allow you accept that, but do allow me this opinion, because I do mean it—and I'm a fairly bright boy.

I don't know how much any of us will be able to go with you on the coming adventure, but I do know that a good deal of you will remain reflected in all of us. You've had such a profound and indelible impact on so many—certainly including me—and I thank you enormously for being here, for attending to us all, for caring for us all, and for helping to save each and every one of us. I'm sure right now that you are working to let go of the “famous teacher” ego and rest even more fully in the Divine Presence, but I just wanted you to know that it was exactly that Presence that you presented to each and every one of us, that you showed to us, that you shared with us, and that you freely gave to each and all who were fortunate enough to know you.

There are few lives I can think of that have been as truly, integrally, authentically engaged. And humanity as a whole is just that much closer to a genuine realization of God because of you. Bless you, bless you, bless you, my friend—I will carry you in my heart forever.

Eternally yours,  
**Ken Wilber**



Ken Wilber is often referred to as the “Einstein of consciousness studies” and is a preeminent scholar of the Integral stage of human development. Ken currently lives in Denver, Colorado, and is still active as a philosopher, author, and teacher.

# Fr. Thomas Keating: Awakening Us to Love

RICHARD ROHR, OFM, CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

I like so many others, am grateful for the gift of the person and the teaching of Fr. Thomas Keating. It's hard to fully evaluate the impact he's had; I imagine it will take years to unfold. I came to be aware of Thomas Keating in the late 1980s through his book *Open Mind, Open Heart*. I immediately thought: "He's saying what I'm trying to but in a much better way!" While we came to contemplative Christianity from different places, we arrived at a similar understanding of unitive consciousness and practice.

In 2002, I finally had the opportunity to meet Fr. Keating in person at the Center for Action and Contemplation's conference where we spoke together on "Healing Our Violence." Again at a CAC conference, "The Eternal Now" in 2004, and many times since, I have encountered first hand his great humility and authority. He knew what he believed, and he wasn't afraid to disagree, but in the most kind and gracious way. I'm grateful for our shared vision and our spiritual friendship.

Along with fellow Trappists William Meninger and Basil Pennington, Keating is known for developing the practice of Centering Prayer. He brought an accessible form and broader awareness to the Christian contemplative tradition, a path that is not only for monks and theologians but ordinary people.

Keating helped us trust God's loving presence and experience its healing power through silence. He taught that God is infinitely and always present; the spiritual journey, Keating said, "is a process of dismantling the monumental illusion that God is distant or absent." In prayer there's no need for judgment or shame when our thoughts predictably start wandering down their usual rabbit holes. What matters is our desire—and even that is a gift of grace—to return to Presence again and again and again.

Fr. Keating had a long lifetime (95 years!) to practice being present to Presence. Now I trust that he will simply continue experiencing the mystery of union with God, which is not unknowable but infinitely knowable.

Earlier this year in my Daily Meditations, I shared these words from Keating's book *God Is Love*:

There seems to be an intent or a plan in creation to bring into manifestations revelations of the Unknowable One that awaken in us the greater and greater capacity to love. . . . *God is more and more trying to move the human race to the next stage of consciousness. . . recognizing the truth that there is only one self ultimately and this is God manifesting in us.*<sup>[1]</sup>

As a true wisdom teacher, Keating helped many of us move to deeper, more loving consciousness. He taught that dying—whether to our false selves or to our earthly existence—is simply another step in the journey toward oneness. Keating wrote:

Death could be looked upon as the birth canal into eternal life. A little confining and scary, maybe, yet it's the passage into a vastly fuller life. Eternal life means perfect happiness without space or time limitations. It is spaciousness itself. You begin to taste it in deep contemplative prayer. You realize that you don't give it to yourself; it's already within you.<sup>[2]</sup>

Our new body will be spiritualized and not limited to its present physical presence and limitations. One aspect of creation is that, once you have been born into this world, you never die because, as the Hindu religions teach, each of us possesses deep within us an inalienable spark of divine love. [The Song of Songs says that love is stronger than death (8:6).] That spark is the same energy that created the Big Bang. . . .<sup>[3]</sup>

Nothing is more certain than death. It can't simply be a disaster. It's rather a transition like all the other transitions and developments of human consciousness all the way up to unity with Ultimate Reality. The latter involves freedom from the senses and our thinking processes; in other words, entering into the simplicity of the divine energy that pours itself out into the world through continuing creation. The divine energy sustains us with immense love and patience through all the stages of consciousness.<sup>[4]</sup>

May we carry forward Fr. Keating's legacy by opening our hearts to God's presence within ourselves and each other. ☸

[1] Thomas Keating with Carl J. Arico, *God Is Love: The Heart of All Creation Guidebook* (Contemplative Outreach: 2016), 22

[2] Thomas Keating, *From the Mind to the Heart* (Temple Rock Company: 2017). Pages are not numbered.

[3] Thomas Keating and Joseph Boyle with Lucette Verboven, *World Without End* (Bloomsbury: 2017), 83.

[4] *Ibid.*, 87.

# Saved by Silence



PHILEENA HEUERTZ

**F**r. Thomas Keating was one of my favorite spiritual teachers and personal mentors. He introduced me to the Christian contemplative tradition many years ago, and my life has never been the same. I'll never forget how he said, "If you stay on the spiritual journey long enough, the practices that sustained your faith will fall short. When this happens, it can be very disillusioning. But if we stay on the journey, we find out that this is actually an invitation to go deeper with God." That's what happened to me.

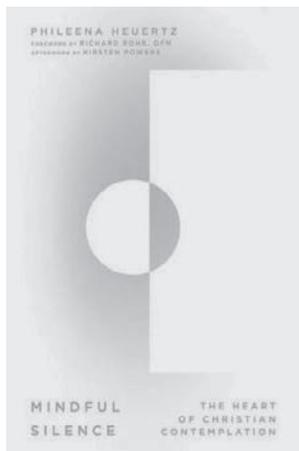
When I landed in West Africa's Freetown, Sierra Leone, it was suffocatingly hot. Sixty percent of the country was still controlled by the rebel forces, but the ten-year war over blood diamonds was slowly coming to an end. Soldiers were being disarmed and brought into UN peacekeeping camps.

Refugees from all over the country were pouring into the capital city—survivors of brutal mutilation and children displaced from their parents. Both the government and rebel forces used amputation as a tactic for fear and control of the population. There seemed to be no mercy for this horrific demonstration of war. Young and old people alike were subjected to having one or both arms chopped off. In some cases, sons were forced to commit the grotesque act on their parents. The only consideration given was the audacious choice between "short" or "long sleeve"—indicating where the severance would take place on the arm.

These brave and broken people struggled with basic daily chores like washing, dressing, and embracing loved ones. Many of the men, farmers, needed *both* hands to work the land. They faced the despair of not knowing how they would ever provide for their families again.

My early life in middle America did not prepare me for this degree of human suffering.

And so there I was in Freetown surrounded by mass agony, attempting to apply redemptive violence by looking for someone to blame, stone, cast into the wilderness, or crucify. As my heart tore open, I wondered, *Who is responsible for all this suffering?* And not only *this* suffering, but who is responsible for *all* the pain in the world? I wanted someone to blame.



Adapted from *Mindful Silence*  
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Published by InterVarsity Press,  
Downers Grove, IL.  
[www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)

For more information visit  
[www.mindfulsilence.org](http://www.mindfulsilence.org)

Phileena Heuertz and her husband  
Chris are founders of the Gravity  
Center, a Center for Contemplative  
Activism that exists to nurture  
the integral connection between  
contemplation and action.

Those many years ago, facing the trauma of a nation Sierra Leone torn apart by war, I found myself plunged into a crisis of faith. What I had learned about God growing up in the Protestant pews of Indiana was radically challenged in the face of human need. My worship had dried up. I had no words to pray. Scripture no longer inspired me. And God seemed painfully silent.

I was afraid. I didn't know how to engage such silence. I thought something must be wrong with me. I felt as if I didn't have enough faith; or even worse, something must be terribly wrong with God. Thankfully, Fr. Thomas came into my life right on time. Early one spring Saturday morning, my husband's spiritual director left a voicemail inviting the two of us to have dinner with his beloved teacher, an elderly monk that we'd never heard of named Thomas Keating. We were mesmerized at dinner by this tall, humble, Gandalf-like figure dressed in a black robe. Turns out, his religious order, the Cistercians, observe a strict rule of silence. It was out of his deep well of silence that his life radiated so much peace and wisdom. Following dinner, Fr. Thomas gave a teaching and closed with a guided Centering Prayer practice.

Fr. Thomas' teaching was like a wellspring to my arid soul. With gentle authority—the kind of credibility that comes from experience—he opened a portal to God's nourishing presence. He helped me realize that I didn't need to be troubled or discouraged by God's *felt* absence and grueling silence. Like an old transistor radio, I just needed to learn how to tune in to this new frequency. After that day, I found courage to give myself to the silence with all of its darkness, questions, doubts, and pain. And it was there, in the great, deafening that I woke up.

In the face of agony in Sierra Leone, my faith fell short. Forgiveness for such horrific wrongs seemed like an impossibility. Healing for my friends and their nation seemed completely out of reach. When I had a hit a wall and come to the end of myself, contemplative prayer, in the form of a Christian meditation method called Centering Prayer, became the only way in which I could attempt to encounter God. There, in solitude, silence, and stillness, I could just show up—as I am with all my doubts, questions, and pain. And over time, the gentle, secret, grace-filled presence of God began to reveal a love so enormous that it has the power to transform all the pain of the world—beginning with my own. ☸

# When Words Are Not Enough

JEFF OLIVET

I met Thomas Keating fifteen years ago at a conference that he and Richard Rohr convened in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had been asked to compose contemplative chant and lead music for the conference. As a young social justice advocate, homeless outreach worker, and musician, I was at a pivotal moment in my spiritual development. Having grown up in an evangelical Christian tradition that was heavy on words—sermons, prayers, memorization of scriptures, long conversations—I found myself longing for silence. The words had, for me, become inadequate to describe the divine. All the words spoken in church seemed frail attempts to name something unnamable, and to put words to something that was bigger than words.

At the Keating-Rohr gathering, three days of silence, music, and teaching brought contemplative practitioners and seekers together in downtown Albuquerque—in the heart of the city’s homelessness crisis. Against that backdrop, I was drawn into the power of a thousand people sitting silent, waiting, listening. *Be Here Now*. That was the theme of the conference. As the days passed, I gradually melted into an awareness that being here now was enough.

Long before the conference, I had come to believe, as Keating wrote in *Open Mind, Open Heart*, that “the root of prayer is interior silence.” I had sat in silence in the chapel at Sénanque, surrounded by fields of lavender. I had been on retreat at Gethsemane, sleeping in front of the fireplace in Thomas Merton’s hermitage, where he prayed, wrote, and lived the second half of his life. I had been sitting half lotus on a mat day after day at home and in a contemplative prayer group each week. Yes, I had come to know austere, spacious silence.

But it was different now as I listened to these two great teachers and watched the hungry expressions on a thousand faces from my music director’s perch. The conference somehow brought silence and



“He wanted everyone to come to know the beauty, connection, peace and wisdom that grow from the seeds of contemplation.”

contemplation into the world, as opposed to providing an escape from it. Already 80 years old, Fr. Thomas’ energized teaching combined the deep calm of a disciplined prayer life with the zeal of someone who has discovered something too good to keep to himself. He wanted everyone to come to know the beauty, connection, peace and wisdom that grow from the seeds of contemplation.

As I continued to work as an advocate, outreach worker, and musician, the coming years were for me an unfolding understanding of the power of combining silence and social justice or—in Fr. Rohr’s words—action and contemplation.

In my ongoing work to fight homelessness, words are necessary. We connect with the suffering of our brothers and sisters through words. We change policy through words—spoken and written. We deepen our commitment to social justice through writing, reading, and conversation. And yet, I will always be drawn back to Fr. Thomas’ teachings on the power of interior silence as the root of prayer and the foundation for our work in the world. ☸

Jeff is a national leader on homelessness, poverty, and public health. He has been a street outreach worker, case manager, housing director, coalition builder, writer, teacher, and activist. In addition to social justice work, Jeff has cultivated a life of prayer and meditation for more than two decades. He lives in Cambridge Massachusetts

# Centering Prayer: My 11th-Step Practice

SUSAN B.

I discovered Centering Prayer inadvertently last April when checking the schedule of an upcoming 12-Step conference and I immediately searched for more information online. As soon as I read the instructions, freely given on the Contemplative Outreach website, and engaged in my first Centering Prayer session, I felt an instant connection and comfort with the practice. The next day, after watching a video of Fr. Thomas Keating explaining the method, I knew that I had found my spiritual home.

While Centering Prayer comes out of the Christian contemplative tradition, the practice, itself, is non-sectarian in nature, and can be embraced by anyone. I am not a Christian but have been a recovering 12-Step member for over 30 years. And I've been on a long and winding journey searching for the best fit for my 11th step practice ever since.

The paths I've walked for meditation have focused on a) becoming enlightened b) feeling peaceful or c) being present. Try as I might, I always fell quite short of attaining any of these states of being, which was pretty frustrating. The enlightenment piece was a special bone of contention as the years passed and I got no closer.

Centering Prayer is completely different. Its sole purpose is to deepen our relationship with our Higher Power. That's it.

The practice is brilliantly simple and the instructions clear and few. Though technically a prayer and not a meditation technique, I find that Centering Prayer embodies similar characteristic. While all meditation

practices have a certain commonality, the subtle differences existing between Centering Prayer and other methods that I've practiced are profound for me. I feel that it's the perfect 11th-Step practice because of its simple, clear intention and ease of learning.

I've always believed that Step 11 was a linchpin of recovery. Meditation teaches me how to sit in discomfort, which has really helped me stay sober, solvent, and abstinent when the going got tough. But I found in Centering Prayer specific instructions lacking in 12-Step program literature. For the first time in decades, I've been practicing enthusiastically 20 minutes twice a day without fail. That is in stark contrast to my former resistance to practicing even once a day for five minutes.

Because Fr. Keating's teachings and Centering Prayer are so expansive and inclusive, it makes sense that they would be embraced by those in 12-Step recovery. I was also delighted to discover the existence of the 12-Step service arm of Contemplative Outreach for support.

Over time, after reading such books by Fr. Keating as *Divine Therapy and Addiction*, it became clear to me that he fluently speaks the language of recovery and has a deep, abiding understanding of, and empathy for, the spiritual path that we walk. Because of that, I've found all his writings and videos to be a rich source of healing material for my own 12-Step journey.

I am profoundly grateful to Fr. Keating for so much, not the least of which is his generosity of spirit in freely offering instructions for the practice. Most of all, I will be forever grateful to him for the part he played

in helping revive the precious gift of contemplative prayer molding it to the modern spiritual aspirant under the forms of Centering Prayer and the Welcoming Prayer. The true beauty of these teachings is that they can be embraced and practiced by all faith traditions or none, by all who are seeking deeper spiritual connection with their Higher Power.

As with any spiritual method, Centering Prayer will not resonate with everyone. But if you have been seeking a way to begin or enhance your 11th-Step practice, then I urge you to give Centering Prayer a try. ☸

## Centering Prayer 12-Step Outreach

We are 12-Step people who practice Centering Prayer as our 11th Step and pass it on to others in 12-Step programs. We offer introductions to Centering Prayer called "Teaching Centering Prayer as an 11th-Step Meditation Practice," in a one-day format or in a weekend-retreat format. We know from experience that it is helpful to have a community of fellow 12 Steppers practicing Centering Prayer as an 11th-Step practice in order to help nurture and deepen our own commitment to the prayer.  
<http://cp12stepoutreach.org/>

## Online Meditation Chapel

Wednesdays at 3pm Eastern Time, hosted by Susan B (12-step Centering Prayer, open to all). Read more about it on the CO website under Meditation Chapel.



# Out of the Prison Wilderness

PAUL DEITERING, PRISON CONTEMPLATIVE FELLOWSHIP



The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.

- MATTHEW 4: 16

**M**y name is Paul Deitering. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Fr. Thomas Keating and all who work to share the Good News of contemplative practice to those who long for it.

I entered the prison system at age 15 and spent the next 22 years behind bars. Much of that time I considered my life to be a tragic waste of potential. I felt hopeless and isolated. Prison was both a cage to keep me away from society and a shield that kept the world from witnessing my shame.

In 2010 Ray Leonardini, a volunteer prison chaplain at Folsom Prison, introduced me to Centering Prayer and the writings of Fr. Keating. My attention was grabbed as I listened to Ray speak about this different way of praying, without words. It seemed made for me. It did not require that I trust anyone or pledge allegiance to any religion. All that I was asked was to orient my intention toward God and trust the experience that I had in the Silence of my own heart.

Over the next several years I became an active member of Prison Contemplative Fellowship at Folsom. My life changed in many amazing ways (subtly at first). I had adapted so well to the perils of the prison environment that I could not tolerate even the appearance of vulnerability or weakness in myself. I had a robust false self, as Fr. Thomas might say.

Like many others in prison, I had a brutal understanding that my life was utterly wasted and meaningless. There were no trappings of success or even marginal achievement that I could point to in order to persuade myself that I was doing alright. I had exhausted all the usual methods of distraction to no avail. I was heavily burdened by self-loathing when I encountered this Centering Prayer practice. In the Silence, God communicated tenderness for me, something for

## Prison Contemplative Fellowship

Prison Contemplative Fellowship (PCF) is an association of volunteers, prison chaplains, prisoners and former prisoners, who practice Centering Prayer.

We support these groups in starting and growing contemplative prayer groups in prisons and jails.

For more information,  
contact: [office@uspcf.org](mailto:office@uspcf.org)

*Locked Up and Free* is a revised version of a pamphlet used by Contemplative Outreach for over 20 years. It is ideal for a first contact with prisoners interested in Centering Prayer. The brochure is available in the Contemplative Outreach bookstore or at Prison Contemplative Fellowship.

“Suffering can get one moving along the spiritual path of transformation. But so can Love .”

which I had no defense. It pierced me through. I didn't know where it came from, only knew that it was what I had longed for. Over time I became convinced that it was an invitation to intimacy from a God that I had so utterly misunderstood.

I am now on the most exciting journey of my life. Staying attuned to the draw of the divine that pulls at my heart from the Silence has led me to experiences that are far more fulfilling than I dared hope for. My experience is just one of many others that I have witnessed while in prison that are equally transformative and, yes, miraculous. But why is this happening to the men at Folsom and prisons around the country? What is it about Centering Prayer that suits prisoners so well?

The answer is in their formative experiences that shaped their image of God in their young minds as a judgmental authority figure before whom they should feel shame and guilt. This false image is amplified by their experiences of suffering and the dehumanizing consequences of a lifetime of poor choices – all of which has taught the imprisoned that they shouldn't trust themselves. Yet in ways known only to the Divine, these experiences ready a man or woman for surrender, if only there is an ounce of assurance that we will not be annihilated by letting go of these deeply negative experiences.

Suffering can get one moving along the spiritual path of transformation. But so can Love. Who hasn't felt a desire to be their best self for the sake of the one they love? In my humble experience, it is after surrender that the love affair begins.

Fr Thomas knew this. He knew that surrender was not just for those in the monastic life. He knew it should be brought to the special ones of God, to those whose suffering has made them strong and ready to carry out the purpose for which they were created. This is why I honor his fidelity to the truth of God's divine presence in all of us. And why I join hands with those who feel called to carry on his work.

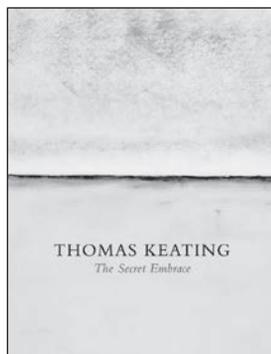
May the Peace of Christ be with you. ☸

*In his last weeks and days, this prayer was read to Fr. Thomas at his request:*

Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands;  
do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures –  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.  
Into your hands I commend my soul:  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
for you are my Father.

Charles de Foucauld, *The Prayer of Abandonment*

## RESOURCES IN OUR ONLINE STORE



### Thomas Keating: The Secret Embrace

Fr. Thomas Keating wanted to include a poem he had written in the next printing of Peter Jones' other book, *From the Mind to the Heart*. Peter encouraged his Uncle Thomas to submit more poems, and from that request, seven additional poems are the centerpiece of this beautifully-designed book.

What emerges from the core of Fr. Thomas' thinking is an alternate way of articulating high spiritual concepts inside short intereconnected verses that provide an ambience in which to absorb them. Charlotte Frieze, author and artist, has contributed her watercolor paintings depicting the sea, forever in a state of transformation and transcendence. **\$25 USD**



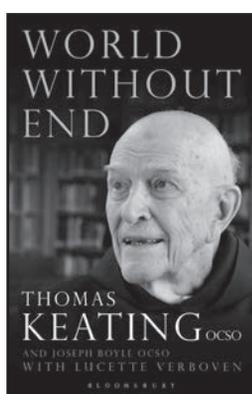
### The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living

*The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living* offers a vision of hope and a view of reality that counter the cultural norms that view death as a tragedy, or the end of living, or an entry into harsh judgment and retribution. Fr. Keating focuses on the transformative process of death and dying as part of, rather than the end of, life's journey.

DVDs & guidebook **\$50 USD**

online video & guidebook PDF **\$25 USD**

CD & reflection booklet **\$20 USD**



### World Without End

In conversations with filmmaker and writer Lucette Verboven, Fr. Thomas Keating looks back on his long life and spiritual development. Fr. Keating discusses themes of awakening, the nature of true happiness and the character and purpose of death. This book also contains an interview with Abbot Joseph Boyle of St. Benedict's Monastery, where Fr. Keating resided for decades. **\$15 USD**



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SAVE THE DATE:  
**United in  
Prayer Day**

Saturday,  
March 16, 2019



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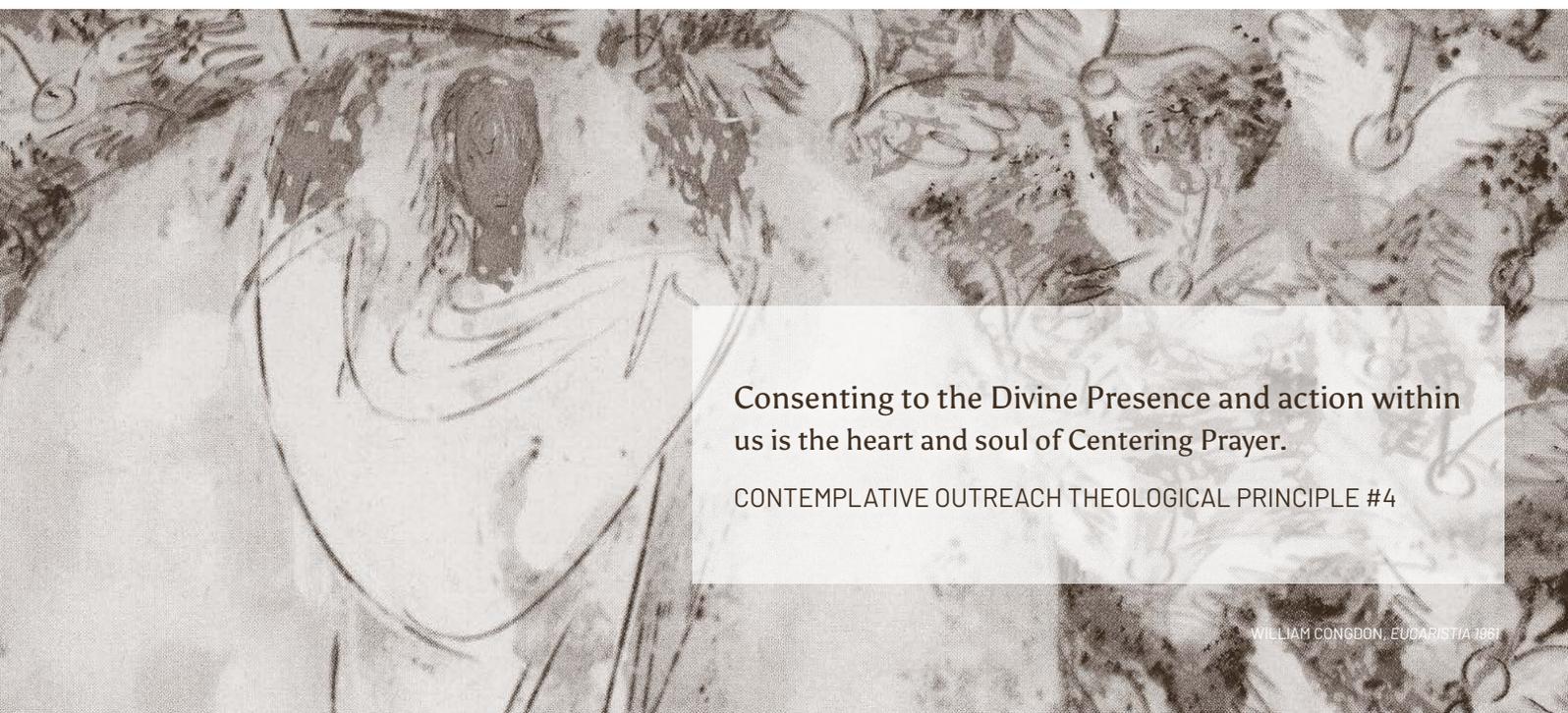
Please send your comments, suggestions and content submissions to Pamela Begeman at [pamela@coutreach.org](mailto:pamela@coutreach.org)



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Consenting to the Divine Presence and action within  
us is the heart and soul of Centering Prayer.

CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE #4