Contemplative Stance:

Discerning the Way Forward as Humanity Transitions from
a Domination Paradigm to a Communion Paradigm

as Articulated by Beatrice Bruteau

By

Candice Jardine Bist

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Regis College
and the Pastoral Department of the Toronto School of Theology
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Theology
awarded by Regis College in the Toronto School of Theology
and the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Candice Jardine Bist 2013
ABSTRACT

The thesis is written in response to difficulties observed in ministry where those inside and outside the formal Christian church struggle to find meaning and value in their lives in the Western context at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Chapter One examines the thought of Beatrice Bruteau, concluding that humanity must take an active part in the current shift in consciousness from understanding the self as separate, to seeing the self as part of the web of life that involves others, the cosmos, and the sacred spirit. Chapter Two examines contemplative stance, the posture held in the practice of spiritual direction, offering it as a valuable component in this shift of consciousness. Chapter Three looks at four community initiatives practicing contemplative stance in rural communities. The Conclusion offers suggestions as to how contemplative stance might be practiced in the educational system and in religious centres of worship.
We can't solve problems by using the same level of consciousness and same kind of thinking we used when we created them.
—Albert Einstein
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTEXT OF THESIS AND ITS WRITER</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH QUESTION</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INITIAL RESPONSE</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THESIS STATEMENT</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERVIEW OF METHOD AND APPROACH</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REASONS FOR WORKING WITH SCHOLARSHIP OF BEATRICE BRUTEAU</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARY'S KITCHEN</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE ELDERS’ APPRECIATION LUNCH</strong></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOARDING HOMES MINISTRIES</strong></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTEMPLATIVE RETREATS</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Context of Thesis and Its Writer

I am an ordained minister under the authority of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. I am also a practicing spiritual director, trained at Regis College, a Jesuit centre of study at the Toronto School of Theology.¹ My formal theological background is primarily in the Reform Protestant tradition, having studied at Knox College,² TST, though my life experience has exposed me to a wide variety of both Christian and non-Christian religious traditions and belief systems. Six years of study at Regis College has introduced me to the rich scholarship and pastoral gifts of the Catholic faith in the Ignatian tradition. My perspective has been shaped by being born and raised in twentieth-century North America and currently living in Canada in the twenty-first century. For the past eleven years I have worked in rural ministry. Six of these years were spent in a formal parish setting as the sole minister for a family-sized church transitioning to a pastoral-sized church.³ I currently work with a variety of community ministries that seek to develop capacities outside the institutional church north of Toronto, Ontario where I live. Those I serve live mostly in the Townships of Mulmur⁴ and Clearview.⁵ While these townships still

¹ Regis College is the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at the University of Toronto, one of North America's Roman Catholic ecclesiastical faculties. http://www.regiscollege.ca.
² Knox College is a theological school of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a federated College of the University of Toronto, and a founding member of the Toronto School of Theology. http://www.knox.utoronto.ca.
³ A family-sized church is under fifty members or adherents. A pastoral church has between fifty and a hundred and fifty members or adherents. The dynamics of the churches are different, the former running as a family does, with patriarchs and matriarchs in charge, and the later, with the minister as pastoral leader. See: Roy M. Oswald, “How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program and Corporate Sized Churches,” Action Information 17, no. 2 (March/April 1991): 1-7. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200702/200702_000_various_size.cfm. (accessed April 1, 2012).
include the traditional farms common to rural areas, they are now home to many commuters working outside its boundaries, those with second homes used as country retreats on weekends and holidays, and young families who have moved north from the city to seek a quieter lifestyle and more affordable housing. The Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve runs through the area, attracting organic farmers and environmentalists. In any given week, a read through the local newspapers in Creemore, Stayner, Collingwood or Shelburne, reveal a population of great diversity, both economically and socially, and one actively involved in local community activities and political engagement. A recent event, Soupstock, organized by the people living in Mulmur and Clearview, drew forty thousand people to Woodbine Park in Toronto to eat soup made from produce grown in the two townships and voice opposition to a proposed limestone quarry in this area of rich farm land. Shortly thereafter, the Highland Company, which had made the proposal, withdrew their application as a result of strong local


7 For a quick overview of current issues in the area visit the website of the Creemore Echo. http://www.thecreemoreecho.com.


9 “The Highland Companies, backed by The Baupost Group, a Boston based hedge fund, has made application to excavate a +2,300 acre limestone quarry, 100 km northwest of Toronto, in Melancthon Township. If approved, this would be the largest quarry in Canadian history, and the second largest in North America. The quarry, would irreversibly eradicate Class 1 agricultural land, involve excavation 1.5 times as deep as Niagara Falls and 200 feet below the water table in an area known as The Headwaters, since it the highest point of elevation in Southern Ontario and home to the headwaters and sensitive recharge area of numerous important river systems that provide water resources for approximately 1 million Ontarians. The proponent intends to manipulate 600 million litres of water daily (equivalent to 25% of all water consumed by Ontarians on a daily basis), in perpetuity. A large and growing number of Ontario residents and concerned environmental organizations have understandingly become very alarmed that our government could potentially authorize Highlands to proceed with what could prove, in retrospect, to be an environmental disaster.” From web site designed, organized and written by residents of Clearview/Mulmur Townships. http://nomegaquarry.ca.
opposition.\textsuperscript{10}

In the particular context where I live and work, I have noted the increasing perplexity many people face as they attempt to negotiate the everyday trials of life. Decision-making appears to be fraught with anxiety. Relationships are increasingly fractious. Addiction and mental illnesses of all kinds appear to affect many families with whom I come into contact.\textsuperscript{11} In simple day-to-day interactions, fearfulness seems to be the driving force behind forward movement.

When I survey the larger landscape of Western\textsuperscript{12} politics, with its inconsistent economic strategies and ongoing environmental challenges, I observe the same faltering vision on a larger scale. It appears, both in individual lives, and in the larger arena of social/political/economic policy making, that those living within the North American Western culture are struggling to imagine a way forward that reconciles the present with a future that is life sustaining.\textsuperscript{13}

This is further complicated in Western culture, by a break down of allegiance to formal modes of religious practice, which might in the past have offered a cohesive pattern upon which

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] As an example, in a small local hamlet active addiction includes a new mother being treated for heroin addiction, a grandfather seeking counselling for sex addiction, five practicing alcoholics and one seeking help with alcoholics anonymous, two husbands battling drug and video game addictions, and several women and children struggling with obesity. Another father was recently arrested and imprisoned for physical abuse within his family. This is all within twelve homes clustered together. Several suicides in the same hamlet are also alcohol and drug related. Those struggling with these various challenges are equally distributed between those involved in the church, and those who are not, though all have grown up in and around the Christian church culture of their hamlet. For Canadian mental health statistics see: ‘Mental Health and Addiction Statistics’ from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/newsroom/for_reporters/Pages/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.aspx
\item[12] I am using the term ‘Western’ here in a geographical sense—North America and Europe—as well as referring to the lifestyle and culture associated with places of European influence.
\item[13] “We have in our hands a vast set of powers, which are products of our intellectual development. We have used these powers to construct an intricate machinery of life, all in the service of our childish desires. And now we are waking up to the fact that we cannot control it; that we do not even know what we want to do with it. So, we are beginning to be afraid of the work of our hands. That is the modern dilemma.” John Macmurray, \textit{Freedom in the Modern World} (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 24, quoted by William A. Barry, SJ, \textit{Changed World, Changed Heart, Transforming Freedom of Friendship with God} (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011).
\end{footnotes}
individuals could rely for instruction. Most of the people whom I encounter in my own setting are Christian by lineage, but rarely, if ever, in formal practice or doctrinal understanding.\textsuperscript{14} Members of the older generation may attend church from time to time, but question much of the teaching, and find their spiritual solace in family, nature, art, music and involvement in the community.\textsuperscript{15} Many of the young people appear to have dismissed the Christian faith entirely, and are largely ignorant of any benefits it might offer.\textsuperscript{16}

And yet, I also observe, both in my local community, and within the larger Western context, that there is an increased interest in spiritual matters and a longing for connection to others and the natural world.\textsuperscript{17} In the midst of the Internet explosion of information, there is a desire for wisdom that runs deeper than intellectual knowledge.\textsuperscript{18} And as the world seems to fracture into multiple competing entities, there is a personal yearning for wholeness and meaning.

\textsuperscript{14} A quick survey of a choir that has gathered in my home every other week for almost four years reveals that they were all brought up in what they refer to as Christian homes. They attended Sunday school and ten of the twelve were baptized. None of them currently attend church, nor do their children, though they occasionally attend events hosted by a local church. None of them refer to themselves as Christians.

\textsuperscript{15} Among the thirty elders who attend the ‘Elder’s Appreciation Lunch,’ hosted in various homes in the community once a month, only one attends church regularly. When the group gathers, there is always a grace and blessing before the meal, which they enjoy and encourage. The younger people who attend the luncheons have formed a ‘community of affection,’ which surrounds and supports them. This community of affection, in which Wendell Berry puts so much store, has solidified over time, and perhaps taken the place of a church community. See Chapter Three for further discussion of the Elder’s Appreciation Lunch.

\textsuperscript{16} I have been officiating at weddings for young people for the last eight years and almost all the services have been performed outside the church, in gardens, forests, meadows and various private settings. The readings chosen are rarely from religious scriptures, but from popular and classical culture. The couples are suspicious of what they deem ‘religious language’, though their sensibilities exhibit a natural graciousness and spiritual generosity. They have formed tight, informal bonds with other young families in the community.


\textsuperscript{18} Marjorie J. Thompson, Soul Feast, An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1-17. Thompson begins with this statement: “There is a hunger abroad in our time, haunting lives and hearts. Like an empty stomach aching beneath the sleek coat of a seemingly well-fed creature, it reveals that something is missing from the diet of our rational, secular, affluent culture. Both within and beyond traditional faith communities, a hunger for spiritual depth and integrity is gaining momentum.”
in daily life.\textsuperscript{19} As a Christian minister these are difficult matters to reconcile. My devotion is to the way of love, which the Gospels so beautifully articulate through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is my deeply held belief that the spirit of Christ can offer healing and inspiration to all people, regardless of their religious inclinations, or lack there of. But those whom I serve have, for the most part, rejected the formal church in its current form, as they understand it to be.\textsuperscript{20} Still they falter, and suffer, and can make no sense of the uneven ground of common culture, even as they yearn for spiritual connectedness.\textsuperscript{21}

With these perplexing thoughts in mind, I came upon the writings of Catholic theologian Beatrice Bruteau. Her interpretation of a shifting worldview from a domination paradigm to a communion paradigm\textsuperscript{22} reflects my personal experience in ministry and my observations of the larger cultural landscape. Bruteau’s thesis, \textit{The Holy Thursday Revolution},\textsuperscript{23} is decidedly Christian in origin, yet available to a wider audience through her inclusive lens and imaginative interpretation of Jesus Christ and God. In it, Bruteau proposes that humanity is discovering a new understanding of the nature of consciousness, moving from an awareness of the self as a separate entity from others, to the self as intimately intertwined not only with other humans, but

\textsuperscript{19} Ursula King, \textit{The Search for Spirituality, Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life} (Toronto: Novalis, 2008). On the front inside jacket, it reads: “An immense spiritual hunger exists today, a deep longing for a life of personal wholeness and meaning and a society of greater justice and peace. The universal upsurge of interest in spirituality in all its different forms is the urgent call to find new ways of mindful and sustainable living, and to spiritually transform our economy, politics, education, and culture.”

\textsuperscript{20} I recently hosted two retreats at my home. Of the twenty-six people involved, only one woman considered herself religious, being a devout Jew. Three other women attended Jewish services on occasion. One woman is part of a small Christian cell group she considers her home church. The other twenty-one people, though raised in either the Jewish or the Christian faith, do not consider themselves to be part of either of these practicing religious groups.

\textsuperscript{21} Thomas Berry would say of our current situation that we are ‘between stories’. He writes, “It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.” \textit{The Dream of the Earth} (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 19.

\textsuperscript{22} See Chapter 1, pg. 17 for discussion of these terms.

\textsuperscript{23} Beatrice Bruteau, \textit{The Holy Thursday Revolution} (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005).
with the entire cosmos. She observes this shift in consciousness in the gospel stories and proposes that Jesus encouraged his followers to live from a place of understanding themselves as intimately connected to one another, to the divine spirit, and to the world at large.

The difficulty, however, remains. If the current anxiety that plagues those I serve has as its undercurrent a deep shift in consciousness concerning the nature of the self, what practical methods in day to day living might be employed to ease this tension and aid the process? And given the great loss of trust in the Christian faith, both in my own locale, and in the wider North American culture as I have observed it, in what form might the Christian heritage impart its considerable collected spiritual wisdom?

Here I arrive at the practice of contemplative stance as I have come to understand it from my training in spiritual direction at Regis College and as practiced in my role as director, both with individuals and collectively in the community. A contemplative stance involves a posture of attentive waiting that opens the consciousness to a reality beyond what is seen with the eye. It allows for both the process and posture of discernment. Discernment provides a manner of viewing the world that recognizes not only the knowledge of the mind, but the hidden movements of the heart that engage our deeper relationships and values. Contemplative stance, and the discernment that emerges from it, present choices that are life giving to the one engaged


25 The contemplative stance is a posture of attentive waiting that allows for the practitioner to discern the movements of the divine spirit in the practice of discernment. A deeper understanding of this stance is developed in Chapter Two.

26 For the purposes of this thesis, I will be concerned with spiritual direction in the contemporary Christian tradition, though it should be noted that spiritual direction can be found in a variety of settings, both within formal religious cloisters and outside of them. My training at Regis is influenced by the Ignatian tradition. See citings in Chapter Two for historical overview of Christian spiritual direction as well as spiritual direction in other traditions.


28 For discussion of discernment and appropriate citings, see Chapter Two, 53-57.
in its exploration, but equally to those surrounding and connected to the practitioner.\textsuperscript{29} Further, the disciplines that undergird this stance, can be learned and experienced by anyone who desires to intentionally move toward an understanding of the self as part of an integrated whole and deepen their knowledge of themselves as spiritual beings. In the context of this thesis I will be working from a Christian perspective, but it is important to note that the practice of contemplative stance does not require a devotion to a formal religious practice, though it does assume openness to the sacred and to the existence of awareness beyond human intellect.\textsuperscript{30} And though contemplative stance, at least in this thesis, will be introduced through the tradition of spiritual direction, it is a discipline that may yet travel outside its birthplace to minister to the population in general, thus aiding individuals to make this shift in consciousness that is at the base of the emerging Western worldview in the twenty-first century. This stance, I propose, may greatly aid those in my rural setting as they attempt to maneuver through the rough waters of everyday life whether they live within a formal church setting or not.

\textbf{Research Question}

What approach, skill or discipline in the Christian spiritual tradition might offer a fruitful medium in which the present transition in our understanding of humanity, as articulated by Beatrice Bruteau and others, may more easily take place, and further, be accessible to those of all

\textsuperscript{29} Richard Rohr in his introduction to \textit{Contemplation in Action} suggests that between the traditional polarity of conservative and liberal thinking there is a third way forward. He writes: “There \textit{is} a third way, and it probably is a way of “kneeling.” Most people would just call it “wisdom,” which is always distinguish from mere intelligence. It demands a transformation of consciousness and a move beyond the dualistic win/lose mind. Religion has always said that an authentic God encounter is the quickest and truest path to such wisdom... The slow but steady path of contemplative practice can lead us here...” Richard Rohr and Friends, \textit{Contemplation in Action} (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2006), 27.

\textsuperscript{30} At the conclusion of \textit{Nourishing the Spirit}, James and Evelyn Whitehead write, “Today the idolatry of reason associated with the Enlightenment is giving way to a richer appreciation of the remarkable range of human knowing—as well as its enduring limits. This shift opens the way to a renewed recognition of religious intuition and its contribution to human life. Religious appreciation thrives along the broad threshold where reason and emotion overlap, where consciousness contends with the unconscious, where metaphors flourish. In this rich soil religious intuition and spiritual inspirations thrive.” James D. Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, \textit{Nourishing the Spirit, The Healing Emotions of Wonder, Joy, Compassion, and Hope} (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 155.
faiths, and those also who consider themselves outside the boundaries of formal religion?

**Initial Response**

The discipline of contemplative stance, as understood in the practice of spiritual direction, may offer such an approach. The three specific disciplines, which undergird contemplative stance, are accessible to people of all ages who desire to learn them. Contemplative stance begins with attentiveness, an awareness of the self and its surroundings, offering a firm grounding in the world. It proceeds to the practice of resistance, a refraining from habitual or automatic responses, in order to make space for ways not yet imagined. And it requires self-emptying, a letting go of personal agendas and inner turmoil in order to create a hospitable space for God, or the spirit of life as it is understood. With these three inner movements practiced, the resulting discernment allows for a flexible response to the intricacies of the world and the possibility of a transforming consciousness that views human reality as an interconnected web of relationships.

**Thesis Statement**

The thesis proposes that both the place created by the spiritual grounding of contemplative stance and the discernment that arises from this place of attentive waiting, are important elements in coming to understand the self as an integrated part of the cosmos. It proposes that the practicing of these disciplines is foundational to the spiritual transformation of consciousness that is currently underway. And further, that without this revolution in understanding, humanity will not make the necessary shift from a domination paradigm to a communion paradigm.

**Overview of Method and Approach**

The method used will be interpretive, informative and imaginative. This involves interpreting the work of Beatrice Bruteau in the larger body of scholarship concerned with the Western post-modern context followed by information and instruction on contemplative stance.
The thesis concludes with an interpretation of how contemplative stance is being used in my own community, and brief suggestions as to how it might be imagined in the education system and in religious centres of worship.

Chapter One will examine the theology of Bruteau, with particular attention to the thesis she puts forward in *The Holy Thursday Revolution*. It will commence with a brief overview of the concept of worldviews and the assumptions that form them. There follows a sketch of the current Western post-modern context in the early twenty-first century, followed by Bruteau’s thought on the underlying identity of self which she suspects drives the current construct of her so named ‘domination paradigm’. The emerging identity of self, experienced as mutual affirmation with others and leading to a ‘communion paradigm’ is then identified. Bruteau’s theological interpretation of the ministry of Jesus will explore three particular aspects of the Gospels: Jesus’ baptismal vision, his social expression, and his supper fellowship, with particular attention to the Passover meal shared with his disciples as recounted in the Gospel of John. The chapter concludes by examining the concept of ‘wholistic consciousness,’ which Bruteau proposes must, and is, emerging, as humanity takes part in the evolutionary process.

Chapter two examines the discipline of contemplative stance within the Christian tradition of spiritual direction as a practical response to Bruteau’s proposals. It begins with an explanation of the practice of spiritual direction in which contemplative stance is embedded. Three key skills within the practice are then examined: attentiveness as it draws a person to the present moment, resistance, as the allowing of grace and making of space for new revelations, and self-emptying as it removes matters of personality and individualized concern to make way for the divine

nature to emerge. The inner alertness and detachment from particular ways of being, which results from the practice of these three skills is examined as it applies to discernment, with particular attention to the contribution of Ignatian spirituality.

Chapter Three examines the possibilities of practicing contemplative stance beyond the individual experience, offering a brief survey of the ways it is being used in four communities. This includes a rural community initiative experimenting with the practice of giving and receiving with loving attentiveness, a regular elders’ gathering attempting to break down conventional barriers through communal conversation, a ministry of friendship between those living in boarding homes and church members, and contemplative retreats where hospitality and silence offer teaching through praxis. I am personally involved in all these community initiatives. The conclusion briefly offers imaginative suggestions for incorporating the contemplative stance in the educational system and in religious centres.

The thesis works from the perspective of what is commonly known as the Western world, that is North America and Europe. It will draw on experience and scholarship from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Although this thesis will be developed within this particular framework, it proposes principles that may be universal and transferable. The thesis offers a dialogue between the two fields of spirituality and pastoral praxis, which it assumes as an imperative to any intentional shifting in worldview.  

The thesis is motivated by a hermeneutic of hunger, as articulated by Dorothee Soelle in her extrapolation of liberation theology. In her desire for meaningful, life changing theology, Soelle presents a hermeneutical approach that begins in praxis, moves to analysis, spends time in

---

meditation, and returns to a renewed praxis. This approach mirrors the development behind the thesis. My praxis in rural ministry revealed the emerging of spiritual awakenings in surprising places, despite the obvious despair, confusion and violence in people’s lives. This led me to further study in the field of spirituality, particularly in the training of spiritual direction. An analysis of the work of Beatrice Bruteau and further meditation led me to connect her work with the work of contemplation. The combination of analysis and meditation, or what I would term the practice of contemplative stance, has brought me back to a renewed praxis, which though steeped in the ethos of Christian thought, is less formal in its presentation and more accessible to the community at large.

It should be noted that the approach of the thesis is decidedly suggestive in nature, desirous of exploration and illumination rather than argument and criticism. It is written in the same contemplative stance it appeals to as a place of gathering. As this is a place of mutual collaboration, the thesis attempts to simply place before the reader thoughts for consideration.

**Reasons for Working with Scholarship of Beatrice Bruteau**

Bruteau’s work is characterized by interdisciplinary research reflecting insights in the fields of science, mathematics, philosophy, politics and religion, bringing an enriched view to her Christian faith. Although deeply committed to her Catholic heritage, Bruteau's vision of cosmic reality is inclusive of all faiths. Both in her study and her life, she has incorporated theological reflection, Christian spirituality, interdisciplinary study, and practical theology. Bruteau’s work,

---

33 Soelle articulates her hermeneutic method step by step in the introductory section of *On Earth as in Heaven, On Earth as in Heaven: A Liberating Spirituality of Sharing* (Westminster: London, 1993), ix-xi. Soelle speaks to the emptiness that has left individuals in the Western world largely adrift, and yet, like famished children, searching for the spiritual bread that will sustain them. She writes: “This search for the edible bread of mysticism is not spurred on by dabbling, sniffing now at this and now at that religious tradition. Rather, that search grows with every new defeat of God, with every further destruction of the earth and its inhabitants. It learns to listen to the ‘silent cry.’” Soelle imagines this ‘silent cry’ to be filled with the unheard voices of others, unimagined possibilities, and the divine murmurings of the spirit. *The Silent Cry, Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 59.
though not uncritical of current culture, is never contemptuous in its evaluations. In the tradition of authentic hope, which marks the true Christian spirit, it is clear minded in its analysis, yet encouraging and creative in approach.
Implications

Talk of spirituality is widespread these days. The ubiquitous nature of spiritual language is found in advertising campaigns, political speeches, and newspaper headlines. And yet, the glossy syntax often holds little if any depth and lacks substantial theoretical or historical basis. The Judeo-Christian tradition, however, with its rich spiritual heritage, has much to offer people currently seeking knowledge of spiritual matters. So, firstly, the thesis advocates for greater dialogue between Christians and those in the community who are seeking tools and disciplines for building collaborative consensus.

Secondly, recent scholarship has pointed to a need for further dialogue in the study of spirituality and everyday praxis. Conversation between the two disciplines is not only crucial for scholarship, but also valuable to communities in spiritual formation attempting to marry the theoretical with the practical. This thesis will provide a place of conversation between the study of spirituality and practical theology, offering concrete ways for Christians to confidently embrace their faith, while working co-operatively in interfaith and interdisciplinary scenarios.

And finally, the thesis hopes to encourage and challenge ecclesiastical communities to

---

34 In a report from a conference concerned with the need for spiritual directors in the field of palliative medicine, spirituality was defined in these experiential terms: “Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred.” Christina Puchalski, et al., “Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference,” *Journal of Palliative Care* 12, no. 10 (2009): 887. http://online.liebertpub.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/doi/pdfplus/10.1089/jpm.2009.0142 (accessed September 2010). Douglas Burton-Christie, in his introduction to *Minding the Spirit*, a collection of essays on spirituality, notes that a definition of spirituality should encompass the following: “The daily lived aspect of one’s faith commitment in terms of values and behaviours, how one appropriates beliefs about God and the world, the process of conscious integration and transformation of one’s life, the journey of self transcendence, the depth dimension of all human existence, a dialectic that moves one from the inauthentic to the authentic and from the individual to the communal, the quest for ultimate value and meaning.” Douglas Burton Christie, *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xv. For an overview of Christian spirituality in a modern context, see: Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au “Holistic Spirituality: Our Hunger for Wholeness” in *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 7-23.

35 Claire E. Wolfeich, “Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology.”
examine and practice the spiritual discipline of contemplative stance in a renewed appreciation of its own spiritual history. It is hoped that the invigorated spiritual life of individuals and groups within the church will spill into the community at large, as we collectively attempt to move into a worldview that embraces the communion paradigm.
CHAPTER ONE

Beatrice Bruteau—theologian, philosopher, and social scientist—begins her exploration of the human condition at the beginning of the twenty-first century by directing her gaze to the individual. Though Bruteau recognizes that the maze of difficulties humanity faces are “complicated, abstracted, bureaucratized, large-scale problems,” she refuses to be caught up in abstractions, data, and rhetoric. People, she states, are not statistics. What is perceived as reality, is not something superimposed upon humans, but what emerges from millions of day-to-day decisions being made by individuals. And each choice made, Bruteau claims, reflects not only the way in which a person interprets themselves in relation to others and the world in general, but is also part of the ongoing journey of self-discovery, as each person attempts to understand their existence.

Humanity has always questioned its own existence. In all fields of knowledge the themes of birth, death, divinity, and human purpose reflect our craving to attach meaning to our surroundings. There is a desire to amalgamate the large sweep of history with the mundane tasks of daily living, to integrate our knowledge of the stars with our theological pondering, and to marry our ideologies with the quiet questioning of the soul. The result of this desire is the formation of a set of beliefs or principles through which humans view the world and their place within it. This network of related presuppositions is known in Western intellectual thought as a ‘worldview’—an overarching collection of concepts which gives life meaning and direction and provides an “integrative and interpretive framework by which order and disorder are judged, (and) a standard by which reality is managed and pursued.”

36 Bruteau, The Holy Thursday Revolution, 3.
understanding of this concept of worldviews went largely unnoticed, and therefore unquestioned, in the twenty-first century there is an increasing awareness of their existence and the influence they exert on human problem solving and direction. In addition, there is a developing appreciation of the reciprocity between a particular worldview, and the individuals, contexts and cultures that create and support it. Thus, though a worldview defines an age and influences those within it, it is also true, that those living in a given worldview are not without impact themselves, and may, by their own intentionality, redefine its orientation to reflect changing values. It may then be claimed that as worldviews emerge in response to our “ultimate concerns” — the deep existential questions of human purpose and place—they are at heart, matters of faith, and as such, should be given proper attention by those of the Christian community, and by all those who desire to know more intimately the essence of both humanity and divinity.

The current worldview we live in is most often referred to as post-modernity, the name given to the zeitgeist that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century, separating itself from the previous worldview known as modernity. Modernity, in very brief sketch, describes the age beginning in the mid-sixteenth century defined by a concern with the individual rights of the human, the supremacy of reason, the inception of the nation state, the advance of industrialization, increased secularism, and the emergence of science and technology as guiding leaders in both philosophy and culture. Modernity was a phenomenon birthed in European

---

38 Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). Tillich begins his treatise on page one with the statement: “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern. Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his very existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns - cognitive, aesthetic, social, political.”


40 Post-modernism generally refers to a philosophical intellectual movement while post-modernity refers to the cultural phenomena that can be observed in culture, though the two concepts are intertwined. For further discussion see James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Post Modernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006), 20, footnote 8.
philosophy and shaped by “Western assumptions of the inevitability of progress, the invincibility of science, the desirability of democracy, and the unquestioned rights of the individual. It was assumed that "West is best" and that all other cultures of the world would eventually adopt Western values which would, with the passage of time, become universal.”41 Both modernity’s strident universalism42 and its ‘turn to the subject’, as initiated by 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, can now be seen to be both “emancipatory and entrapping.”43 This is true of all worldviews, for though they emerge as both a response to, and a reflection of, humanities collective and individual view of life, over time, they reach their natural limits, and must make way for an altered orientation reflecting a new consciousness.

Post-modernity, then, is the beginning of this new orientation. Theologian James Smith posits that “post-modernism can be understood as the erosion of confidence in the rational as sole guarantor and deliverer of truth, coupled with a deep suspicion of science—particularly modern science’s pretentious claims to an ultimate theory of everything.”44 Situated as it is, on the tails of modernity and the cusp of a direction not yet known, post-modernity often contains intensified elements rooted in modernity that have wandered in unexpected directions. It is not so much a period on its own, as a time of upheaval and reorientation as the human race struggles to realign its vision of how life should be, with the reality of how life is. As worldviews are large

---

42 Rowan Williams addressed universalism in a 2008 lecture in Liverpool. “The emergent culture of Europe (and I will add here North America) assumed that it had universal validity: but in practice this also meant that those who knew this culture as insiders, those who ‘owned’ it for themselves, had the right to decide how it should work, while those outside the European household had the be content with the structures imposed by insiders (occasionally with the promise held out that outsiders might on day become insiders.)” “Europe, Faith and Culture” (Archbishop of Canterbury’s Liverpool Lecture, Anglican Cathedral of Liverpool - Europe’s Capital of Culture 2008, January 26, 2008) http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1164/archbishops-liverpool-lecture-europe-faith-and-culture (accessed April 5, 2011).
unwieldy matters, the complexity involved in their shifting results in instability and uncertainty. Thus, post-modernity, is a time of struggle and anxiety, for the direction of the new period being birthed is unclear. As individuals are both affected by their existing worldview, and active in recreating a new one, there is a natural tension to the period as harmony is sought to alleviate the crisis.

Into this unsettled landscape Bruteau proposes a nuanced Christian interpretation of the post-modern Western context strongly influenced by the work of paleontologist, geologist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.\(^{45}\) Surveying the current sociopolitical landscape, she discerns a shift from what she calls a *domination paradigm* to a *communion paradigm*.\(^{46}\) By the former Bruteau refers to a pattern or approach that interprets the world as hierarchical, wherein rank ordering, competition, and separation are underlying assumptions.\(^{47}\) She defines domination as “an asymmetrical, or nonreciprocal, relation of determination of being: of the fact that a being is, or of what it is, or of how it can act, or of how it is to be valued.”\(^{48}\) Key to her understanding of domination is that it allows one person, or group, or institution, to determine the value of another.

Though Bruteau allows that in certain situations—emergencies or dominance ranking in animals living in groups for example—domination may be both necessary and beneficial, she believes that domination and the inequity upon which it is based, underlies much of the current suffering she observes and documents in the world: the atrocities associated with war and


\(^{46}\) I am specifically referring to the terms domination paradigm and communion paradigm as they are identified in the work of Bruteau’s writing. It should be noted that these terms are found in broader scholarship, the development of the term owing its existence largely to that of feminist and womanist literature.


genocide; the tyranny of conquering empires and the oppression of the vanquished; the numerous forms of slavery throughout history; the economic systems that continue to encourage disparities between rich and poor; the social stratification of classes that separates and subjugates people on the basis of race, sex, age and numerous subtle distinctions; the ethnic, gender, religious and family abuses that continue to destroy individuals, denying them full personhood; and the ongoing assault by the powerful on the world’s resources, with little concern for those with less access to the basic human requirements of clean air, water, and land.49 Searching for a pattern of thought that might underlie these social/political choices, Bruteau concludes that the basic logic, distinction and definition behind a domination paradigm depends on negation, wherein the individuality of any being is established and maintained by its not being other beings.50 The difficulty, as Bruteau sees it, is that in the domination paradigm, people understand themselves to be separate units from other people, and from the elements of the earth.

In contrast to a domination paradigm, Bruteau defines a communion paradigm as referring to a pattern or approach that interprets the world as an organic whole, each element in relation to the other and interdependent of the other. Instinctive co-operation, intuitive sympathy, and a desire for the well being of the other are core assumptions.51 The individuality of any being is established and maintained in relationship to other beings. She observes that a worldview, or ‘consciousness net’, as she calls it, is a basic human artifact created by fundamental, implicit, person-to-person relations in a net of interactions and interconnected ideas, feelings, attitudes

49 Bruteau, 3-50.
51 Bruteau, “Neo-feminism as Communion Consciousness,” 15.
and unacknowledged assumptions.\textsuperscript{52} At its core, Bruteau claims, the shifting of worldviews reflects a fundamental change in how the self is perceived in relation to others, to God and to the universe.\textsuperscript{53}

Bruteau is not alone in her observation that the Western world is currently in the midst of a paradigm shift.\textsuperscript{54} Nor is Bruteau the first or the only scholar to recognize in this period of transition a shift from understanding the world as a collection of distinct entities to a new view of an intricately connected collective, each part dependent upon the cohesive whole.\textsuperscript{55} In all areas of study this interconnectedness of organisms and systems is becoming evident.\textsuperscript{56} For

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Bruteau, The Holy Thursday Revolution, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Denis Edwards, among others, would agree with Bruteau. He writes: “What is crucial is that cultivation and caring for creation are based on the conversion implied in the model of kinship, a conversion in which human beings come to see themselves as interrelated in a community of life with other creatures, a community in which each creature has its own unique value before God.” Denis Edwards, “Human Beings within the Community of Life, Made in God’s Image,” in Ecological at the Heart of Faith (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 7-26.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Robert J. Schreiter, “A New Modernity: Living and Believing in an Unstable World” (Anthony Jordan Lectures, Newman Theological College, Edmonton, Albert, March 18,19, 2005).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
people making note of these matters, it is clear that humans, regardless of race, 
nationality, religion or ideology are utterly dependent upon one another for survival, and further, 
are intimately connected to the natural resources of the world. 57

The various systems we live in, however, are still structured on the older paradigm of 
competition, inequity, functionalism, coercive power, violence, and the ever increasing use of 
non-renewable resources. 58 Political entities and ideologies have failed to understand that power 
backed by military might only provides a climate wherein escalating violence is needed to 
maintain the status quo, hence the current nuclear stockpile. 59 Monetary systems, built on a false 
economy of debt, are collapsing as whole countries declare bankruptcy, while rabid consumerism 
appears to be the provider of jobs, social status, and self worth. 60 This is particularly true in

57 This is the basic thought at the heart of the ecotheological movement and indeed, all work and study 
directed towards the current environmental crisis. Despite the copious amounts of literature devoted to this topic, 
perhaps nothing so profoundly articulates the need for humanity to work together as the picture taken from the moon 
in December 1968 which revealed a fragile blue orb floating in black space. "Look again at that dot. That's here. 
That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human 
being who ever was, lived out their lives," Carl Sagan said in 1996. "Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, 
deletion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of light. Our planet 
is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help 
will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves." "Forty Years Since the First Picture of Earth From Space," The 

58 Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D. offers this interesting interpretation of current context. She writes: “Our 
experience of God and our spirituality must emerge from our concrete, historical situation and must return to that 
situation to feed it and enliven it. I find a great number of dark night or impasse experiences, personal and societal, 
that cry out for meaning. There is not only the so-called dark night of the soul but the dark night of the world. What 
if, by chance, our time in evolution is a dark-night time - a time of crisis and transition that must be understood if it 
is to be part of learning a new vision and harmony for the human species and the planet?” “Impasse and Dark Night,” 
in Living with Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion, ed. Tilden H. Edwards (San Francisco: 

59 Thomas Merton writing in the mid sixties declared: “We have more power at our disposal than we have 
ever had, and yet we are more alienated and estranged from the inner ground of being and love than we have ever 
been. The result of this is evident. We are living through the greatest crisis known to man. And this crisis is centered 
precisely in the country that has made a fetish out of action and lost (or perhaps never had) the sense of 
contemplation. Far from being irrelevant, prayer, meditation and contemplation are of upmost importance in 
Merton was, at this time, particularly concerned with development and use of nuclear warfare to which he was 
actively opposed.
North America, where the culture of money remains largely unquestioned and continues to
drive the global market with its constant craving for ‘more.’61 It would seem that the current
way of thinking and living as humans on planet earth is unsustainable. And yet the complexity of
the difficulties we face are vast and the systems that currently keep relative global order, appear
to form an almost impenetrable labyrinth.62 Those who may be inclined to turn to the Christian
church for a counter cultural viewpoint, cannot deny that both the Catholic and Protestant
branches of Christianity can be plagued with the same blindness that afflicts the general public..

Constance Fitzgerald, who searches the Christian vista for solutions, observes:

We (the church) are encumbered by old assumptions, burdened by memories that limit
our horizons, and therefore, unfree to see God coming to us from the future. Slow to deal
with different levels of complexity of consciousness or to tolerate ambiguity before the
Holy Mystery of our lives, the institutional Church, it seems to me, is immersed in an
impasse, a crisis of memory, which only a continuing openness to contemplative grace and
purification can transform.63

Bruteau, herself a practicing Christian like Berry and Fitzgerald, is not unaware of the
valid criticisms regarding the institutionalized church. But she avoids this well established
discussion and focuses her attention instead on the collected stories of the life of Jesus Christ as

Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 75–97.
61 Mary Jo Leddy, Radical Gratitude (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 30, 3. Also, see Sandra M.
Schneiders “God is the Question and God is the Answer,” in Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-First Century:
Schneider writes, “The most destructive force at work in our world, it seems to me, is not scarcity or natural
disasters or historical mistakes. It is the centripetal force at work in the heart of every one of us that want to draw
everything we touch to ourselves.” 70.
62 Robert J. Schreiter, “A New Modernity: Living and Believing in an Unstable World” (Anthony Jordan
discern and delineate some of the patterning that is going on in this bewildering variety of data, we give ourselves
over to a Hobbesian world where the strongest and those with most access to power will prevail.” Heather Eaton,
responding to the ecological crisis, writes: “As Albert Einstein suggested, problems cannot be solved at the level of
consciousness which they are created. The ecological crisis cannot be resolved within the current parameters of
cultural consciousness.” “Critical Viewpoints on Ecotheologies in Canada,” in Intersecting Voices: Critical
Theologies in a Land of Diversity, eds. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 246-265.
63 Constance Fitzgerald, O.D.C., “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory,” CTSA Proceedings
recorded in the New Testament writings, placing particular emphasis on the passover dinner on the eve of Jesus’ trail as recounted in the Gospel of John. Bruteau contends that the ministry of Jesus, as recorded in all four gospel accounts, initiated a change in perception from a domination paradigm to a communion paradigm. Here again, Bruteau is not alone in her thought. Marcus Borg and John Crossan in their close examination of the final week of Christ’s death, describe the domination system in Jerusalem as a lethal combination of political oppression, economic exploitation and religious legitimization. They interpret Jesus’ procession into the city surrounded by followers waving palm leaves as a “planned political demonstration.” Borg and Crossan view Jesus’ Palm Sunday processional as a deliberately conceived and executed response to the pomp and power displayed by the Roman prefect who traditionally marched into Jerusalem during Jewish religious celebrations accompanied by a retinue of soldiers, insuring order among the throngs who poured into the metropolis and discouraging the possibility of a Macabean like revolt. Jesus, they contend, was calling the Jewish people from a social order that existed—the domination system—to what might be imagined—a way of living in communion with one another and with God. Claiming Jesus’ proposed social realignment to be revolutionary in nature, Bruteau refers to this intentional shift in consciousness as The Holy Thursday Revolution.

In her thesis of the same name, Bruteau concentrates on three main topics in

65 Borg and Crossan, Last Week, What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem 4, 1–30.
the story of Jesus: the baptismal vision, the social expression and table fellowship resulting from his baptismal experience, and the Passover gathering Christians refer to as The Last Supper.

In the baptism story, Bruteau interprets Jesus’ revelation as his coming to know himself as a child of God, not as Jesus of Nazareth, but as ‘Adam’, a representative of humanity, someone who is “able to hear the message in its immensity and not reduce it to something personal, provincial and exclusive. All People are really children of God.” The idea of being a child of God would not have been new to Jesus, as the Jewish people, through their covenental arrangement with God on Mount Sinai, all considered themselves to have a filial relationship with the one they called their creator. However, Bruteau emphasizes the particularity of one person, in this case Jesus, experiencing a singular transformative realization of what was formerly a generalized piece of scriptural knowledge.

For Bruteau, this profound insight Jesus had into his own personhood, resulted in a radically realigned perception of humanity. If all people were truly children from one source, then everyone, without exception was equal, and equally worthy. Thus, the innermost self of each human was valuable beyond the obvious catagories or descriptions that might be placed upon them by society or their own self-evaluation. And if it were so, that each person were a child of God with all the inherent value that this implied, it was incumbent upon each brother and sister to help and share with their siblings. This new understanding of the self as encountered in Jesus’ baptismal experience, according to Bruteau, initiated the shift in human conciousness she feels is necessary in the current abyss of the post-modern period. She writes:

68 Here are the various stories of the baptism of Jesus Christ. Matt. 3:1–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29–34. “And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Matt. 3:17. (New Revised Standard Version)

69 Bruteau, 52. Note: The italics and capitals are Bruteau’s.

70 Deut. 14:1, 2 “You are children of God... For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the people on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”
The total social program that Jesus advocated was based on communion, friendship, distribution, and partnership. This contrasts with a social organization based on domination, exploitation, accumulation, and force. His program’s central principle is equality, just as the contrasting paradigms principle is inequality. The latter is vertically ordered by ‘power over’. The former is horizontally ordered by sharing and mutual care.\(^{71}\)

Bruteau repeatedly emphasizes that this understanding of the self, as both infinitely valuable and intertwined with all others, is the key to unleashing the full shift in paradigms. But following the lead of Jesus’ experience, this revelation cannot be imposed, but rather must arrive as an act of grace, or an emerging realization. Bruteau maintains that humans already possess deep feelings of their infinite value and knowledge of the communal existence that would result from their expression, but “they are discouraged from showing and fulfilling them by the social systems into which they have been enculturated.”\(^{72}\)

Following Jesus’ baptismal experience, Bruteau observes that for Jesus, a ritually pure Jewish male, his social interactions with outcasts, women, lepers and tax collectors, are a reflection of the transformation both in his sense of self, and his sense of the essence of others.\(^{73}\) Bruteau suggests that Jesus’ way of regarding others passed over the divisive and often dismissive categories into which people may be slotted and catalogued. “The basic theological principle that Jesus brings strongly forward—the universal divine filiation—translates into particular social action in several ways.”\(^{74}\) Jesus did not delineate family by bloodlines, but

---

\(^{71}\) Bruteau, 219.
\(^{72}\) Bruteau, 219.
\(^{73}\) Wayne A. Meeks would add that though Jesus had a profound understanding of himself as a son of God, his self-hood, the development of his human identity, would require interaction with others, and was a process as much as anything else. “The model of selfhood I am suggesting takes identity to be a process, not a substance—a process, lifelong, not a one-for-all, unchanging thing that is oneself.’ . . . It is another way of saying that Jesus becomes a human person as we all do: by interaction with others around him.” Wayne A. Meeks, “Does Anybody Know My Jesus? Between Dogma and Romanticism,” in \textit{Christ is the Question} (Louisville KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 25-61.
\(^{74}\) Bruteau, 56.
expanded the family concept to include all people desiring to know God. His universal attitude allowed for discourse with all economic groups, and many of his parables sketched out the reversal of fortunes between the powerful and the powerless. “He conversed with women he met on his travels, having very important discussions with them about theology and about his own mission: and he sent women to be witnesses for him, something legally impossible.” In a single instance of correction, Jesus acknowledges the faith and wisdom of a Gentile woman, putting aside categories of gender, religion, and education. Jesus spent time in the company of those who were ritually unclean—lepers, menstruating women—without any indication that he needed to engage in ceremonial cleansing afterwards. At the numerous supper gatherings throughout the gospels, Jesus does not observe the social stratification of his culture, but ignores the usual barriers of separation. It is here, around the dinner table, Bruteau believes Jesus was testing and teaching his new understanding of relationships in real life situations, witnessing to a worldview based upon the interconnectedness of all people and the co-operation and nurturing that he hoped would result from these gatherings. “He was using his practice of open

76 Luke 7:36–50. Jesus has dinner at the home of Simon, a Pharisee, where a woman ‘who was a sinner’ washes his feet with ointment and her tears. A discussion ensues between Jesus and Simon regarding hospitality, and the great gifts the woman gives, as opposed to the meagre givings of the host.
77 Luke 18:9–14. This is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Luke 16:19–31. This is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.
78 John 4:4–26. Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman at the well.
79 John 20:11–18. Jesus, speaking to Mary outside the tomb after his death, instructs her to relay a message to the disciples on his behalf.
80 Bruteau, 57.
81 Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30. A Syrophoenician woman approaches Jesus regarding the healing of her daughter. She is initially rebuffed by Jesus because she is not Jewish. But she challenges him on her right to ‘eat the crumbs that fall from the masters’ table.’ Jesus reconsiders her request and stands corrected.
82 Matt. 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–16. This is the story of the healing of the leper.
83 Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5: 25–34; Luke 8: 43–38. This is the story of the woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years.
84 Gathering people around meals was central to Jesus’ ministry, as well as frequent mentions of eating, drinking and banquets in his parables. In the gospel of Luke, there are thirty-six mentions of food or eating, and fourteen occasions where Jesus sits down to eat with others.
commensality as a strategy for building peasant (unpropertied people in villages and small towns) community on radically different principles from those of honour and shame. The basic idea was an egalitarian sharing of spiritual and material resources at the grass roots.**85 And this, Bruteau claims, is the communion paradigm, a way of regarding others based on “equality, reciprocity, mutual indwelling and abundance.”**86

Bruteau postulates that the initiation of the tradition of communion,**87 and the washing of the disciples’ feet,**88 as told in the Gospel of John, reflected Jesus’ instructions to his followers to live out this clearly defined communion based worldview after his death.**89 Foot washing, in the time of Jesus, was the exclusive job of a servant or slave. For Jesus to leave his place at the table, put on an apron, and kneel down to wash the feet of the disciples was a shocking reversal of roles. In the tradition of the great prophets, Jesus was physically demonstrating a foundational teaching. With this act, says Bruteau, he was saying to the disciples,

> You’ve been calling me lord and master, and in the old system that was correct. We’ve been living in a world organized in terms of lords and servants. What I have just shown you is what I think of lordship. When the ‘lord’ acts as a ‘servant’, then being a ‘lord’ or a ‘servant’ doesn’t mean anything any more. ‘Lords and servants’ is not a good way for us to think of our relationships. What I have done is to destroy that whole concept. It’s been a kind of ‘Temple’ for us, in which we have worshiped, done business, understood all our activities, and relations. . . . I have just destroyed that ‘Temple.’ But I am going to build a new one.**90

---

**85 Bruteau, 61.
**86 Bruteau, 63.
**87 Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:15–20. This is the story of Jesus and the disciples gathered for the Passover dinner before his trial and crucifixion.
**88 John 13:1–17. Jesus washes the disciples feet the evening before his arrest and trial.
**90 Bruteau, 59.
In a second demonstration of this same principle, Jesus used bread and wine as symbols for his body and blood, instructing his disciples to remember him whenever they gather together to eat and drink. In the years since, this simple teaching has morphed into the doctrinal ritual we know as The Lord’s Supper or communion. But its original intention, Bruteau suggests, was a physical prophetic enactment of the communion paradigm. Crossan applauds “the appropriateness of eating as an image of human interaction.”

At this final dinner, Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave the bread to those gathered around the table, and this, Crossan sees as having profound symbolic connotations . . . They indicate . . . a process of equal sharing whereby whatever food is there is distributed alike to all. But they also indicate something more important. The first two . . . took and blessed, and especially the second, are the actions of the master; the last two, broke and gave, and especially the second, are the actions of the servant.

Here again, Bruteau views Jesus as demonstrating this new communion paradigm of equality between people, abundant blessing, and commensurate distribution of goods, in this case food.

It is important to note that Bruteau’s viewing of Jesus’ baptism as the pivotal point from which his understanding of the communion paradigm emerged, is decidedly interpretive. As we know little about Jesus before the gospel accounts of his public ministry, it might just as easily be hypothesized that his way of regarding others was his natural way of being from birth. Bruteau’s imagining of what amounts to a personal conversion experience at the time of Jesus’ baptism is much removed from a more traditional interpretation. But whether Jesus’ baptismal experience is seen through Bruteau’s particular interpretation, or through a more orthodox interpretation.

92 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 273. Soelle, including nature into the mix, writes, “How do we wean ourselves from being masters and owners? I think that mystical spirituality of oneness with nature is the best preparation for the other life we are looking for. Dealing sacramentally with bread and water, one’s own body and our nonhuman sisters and brothers, and with energy, the cosmos itself will grow from the abyss that is our domination-free ground.” *The Silent Cry*, 112.
reading of the text, the conversion experience for individuals today, comes when they are able to regard others in the communal way that the gospel writers describe as essential to Jesus’ ministry. Bruteau writes:

The revolution comes when we break through the ordinary mode of seeing and overturn our structures of consciousness from the ground up. This is metanoia, which—if we do it thoroughly—opens us to the ‘kingdom of heaven.’ This ‘kingdom of God’ is always ‘at hand’; it wants only this fundamental shift in the sense of self to bring it into full reality. When the sense of my existential self-being shifts, everything else shifts too: world, God, destiny, meaning, value, duty, desire. If in some way the sense of being a deficient self could be altered, the entire world would have to reorganize itself.93

Although Bruteau believes this fundamental shift in the self was initiated by Jesus and is currently in progress in the Western post-modern context, she is not unaware that it is counter intuitive to most people currently residing in the frantic consumer driven Western culture with its inevitability of progress and the unquestioned rights of the individual.94 Nevertheless, though Bruteau concedes that the shift is slow and cumbersome, she insists that our worldview is indeed shifting, and further, that “the phase transition from domination to communion won’t take place unless we intend and will it, yet the whole history of the cosmos supports it.”95 In addition she claims that humanity’s survival depends upon this change in perception. As a consequence, it can be said that for the first time in history, the human race is able to choose its evolution.96 People, groups, and institutions actively involved in deliberate endeavors to bring about justice,

93 Bruteau, 50.
95 Bruteau, 119.
96 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, 231.
harmony, peace and goodwill among all people and the natural world are working consciously towards this evolution. This includes those living an active Christian life within the church, but equally embraces members of other faith traditions, as well as people who would claim to have no religious affiliation. The Christian church has much to contribute to this collective work and should not hesitate to do so for its value is too immense to be withheld.

Bruteau is not alone in emphasising the imperative need of this work. To bring this new way of collaborative seeing and thinking about is, as Thomas Berry would say, ‘The Great Work’ of our time. Or as environmentalist Sallie McFague succinctly states: “This is the great work of the twenty-first century. Never before have we had to think of everyone and everything all together. We now know that if we are to survive and our planet flourish, we will do so as a whole or not at all.” Louis Savary, interpreting the evolutionary theological ideas of Teilhard de Chardin, which so inspired Bruteau’s work, interprets what he calls ‘The Christ Project’ in these simple, non-religious terms:

(1) We humans are not separate from this planet nor from anyone or anything else on it or in it: and (2) we need to uplift everyone and everything in it. The verb uplift is to be taken in its broadest context. We need to uplift everyone, individually and collectively—from poverty, from hunger, from ignorance, from servitude of one form or another, from lack of purpose and meaning, and so on.

---

99 Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, Elizabeth Liebert, The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 91. “Humans have always struggled to find meaning, to locate their place in relation to others, the world and God in light of their understandings and perceptions of the world. The world that God creates humans moment by moment expands to include the sense that God creates everything moment by moment —suffuses the very evolutionary process—and that humans can and indeed must collaborate in that process.”
Thomas Merton, Christian contemplative and peace activist, states clearly, that “The world is in a state of spiritual crisis. In fact we are now in one of the most crucial periods of development in the whole evolution of man. We are literally at the crossroads of our destiny.” Bruteau lays claim to this same statement. She views humanity as in the midst of a spiritual crisis over its essencial identity and sees the solution to this crisis in the Christian spiritual tradition, though she also claims that the spiritual tradition in all faiths must be brought into the circle of human renewal and transformation. Here it will be discovered that humans are not only in relationship with one another, but also with the divine mystery, that may, or may not be understood as God. This discovery of relationship is at the heart of the work of our time.

I believe Bruteau’s basic assumptions to be correct. The movement from a domination paradigm to a communion paradigm is underway. It involves a new way of seeing the self as intimately connected with others, the natural world, and the mystery that transcends our understanding. Bruteau claims that Jesus initiated this shift. I would question that he was the sole instigator, but would grant that he was a seminal teacher of this change in consciousness, and certainly in the Western context, he is the best-known and most influential leader. Along with Bruteau and others, I regard the importance of being actively engaged in this evolutionary movement as paramount, and agree that core Christian understandings of the self, as reported by the gospel writers in their telling of Jesus’ public ministry, are vital to this important work.

Bruteau began her *Holy Thursday Revolution* with an emphasis on the individual and the moment to moment decisions each person makes throughout their lifetime. In turning to her Christian faith for guidance, she was drawn to the particularities of the life of Jesus Christ, as recounted in the Gospel writings. My work and study emerged from experiences with specific people in specific circumstances. I believe it is here the emphasis must stay: on the individual. For though the array of challenges that lie before humanity is vast, as Bruteau and others argue, the core task lies in a new understanding of the self in relationship to others and the world. The transformation of systems and institutions must begin with a shift in individual consciousness.104

It is my considered thought that the best place to begin this intentional personal transformation is with a deliberate slowing down, a period of waiting in uncertainty, unknowing, and discovery. The way forward to a new understanding of the self, is paradoxically, a time of deliberate contemplative waiting in the still, alert attentiveness that is the core of the practice of

---

104 Bruteau, 247.
contemplation. Constance FitzGerald, a long time contemplative practitioner declares it to be an imperative for any shift in communal consciousness. She writes:

We need to understand and to speak of the unleashed power, influence and freedom of contemplative love and wisdom, of their ability to pass beyond the limits by which both desire, culture, evolution and religion are now enclosed. Contemplation can bring within the realm of possibility the purified imagination able to create not only a global economy and world community that make a human life more possible for the poor, oppressed and marginalize of the world, but even the paradigm shifts and transformations required to invent a new kind of earth community where we re-inhabit the earth in a truly human manner.105

Contemplation, when held in an active posture, is known as contemplative stance,106 and I believe it is here, in the practice of this simple posture, that the individual may find an expanded understanding of themselves in relationship to others and to the cosmos. In its practice of attentiveness, its experience of a fuller reality, and its encounter with the divine Other, this spiritual discipline of contemplative stance gives new sight to standard perceptions, training the mind and eye to resist the known in order to attend upon the unknown. It is accompanied by creativity able to imagine alternate ways of being in any given situation.107 Grounded in the certainty of divine goodness, this practiced posture is able to hold steady in the face of


106 The posture of contemplative stance may be given other names—contemplative leisure, contemplative presence, contemplative attitude, contemplative prayer or simply ‘contemplation’ to name a few. I have chosen the phrase ‘contemplative stance’ for the purpose of this thesis as it denotes a specific intention—a place of ‘standing’ with purpose, a steady, intent posture awaiting grace. Contemplative stance consists of both an element of doing and an element of being. The phrase can be found within the practice of spiritual direction and also within the study of contemplative prayer and the tradition of discernment within Ignatian spirituality. Richard Rohr, who has devoted his life to this discipline and currently oversees The Centre for Action and Contemplation, speaks of it this way: “Contemplation becomes a way of life. I don’t like to think of it so much as something I do, but something I am; so I often use the phrase “the contemplative stance.” It’s a way of living, moving, and being in this world.” Richard Rohr, Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999.)

uncertainty and apparent chaos. It is important to note that the contemplative stance is not for the dilettante, nor is it confined to the formally religious. Contemplative stance works alongside the daily routines of work and worry for all people. In times of stress, violence and despair it is an inspired art form of observation. In allowing a new way of ‘seeing’, the contemplative stance is an invaluable competence to aid in the intentional shift in worldview to which Bruteau suggests humans must turn their attention and an important ingredient in the spirituality of communion she is hoping the world will embrace.

Contemplative stance is an essential discipline in the practice of spiritual direction.

108 In the question and answer period after the Shalem Institute Gerald May Seminar 2012, Cynthia Bourgeault, clarified this idea of contemplation not being about separation from everyday life. “As long as we identify “contemplative” with a lifestyle based on silence and separation, we’re always going to be in implicit tension with “the world.” The real challenge is to learn how to be the still point in the turning world, flowing into this world with the spaciousness of the infinite flowing out INTO the world, to bless and harmonize it, not to thrust ourselves upward and away from it.” Cynthia Bourgeault Q & A – Gerald May Seminar 2012. http://www.shalem.org/index.php/resources/publications/articles-written-by-shalem-staff/cynthiaquestions. (accessed March 12, 2013.)


110 Monty Williams, “The Path of Contemplation,” in Stepping into Mystery: Four Approaches to a Spiritual Life (Toronto: Novalis, 2012), 51, 52.

115 Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation, (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1972), 1-15. This entire book is a lyrical poem on contemplation, but the first two chapters are particularly good at establishing what contemplative stance is and is not.

112 The idea of a ‘spirituality of communion’ is beautifully articulated by Pope John Paul II. “We need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me"." For full text see: John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops Clergy and Lay Faithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html (accessed February 14, 2009)

Spiritual direction involves the intentional being of one person, the director, with another, the directee, for the purpose of assisting in the discernment of the divine in the life of the one seeking direction. Throughout history people have sought out those deemed to be gifted in the ways of the spirit for council and comfort. Spiritual direction is simply a more formal arrangement of this informal inclination. It is, in essence, “an encounter of two persons seeking to listen to the Spirit of God... held within a profound mystery.” It assumes that this profound mystery is within us, between us and around us, whether we are aware of it or not. Spiritual direction as a vocation, is concerned with helping others to wake up to a richer understanding of this mystery. Its purpose is “to help people become aware of the mystery of God’s presence and action in human experience, and to assist them in making a fuller and freer response to it.” In Christianity, spiritual direction is particularly well developed in the Catholic tradition, but in all denominations it is currently experiencing a lively renaissance, a reflection of the general renewed interest in spiritual matters. Though Bruteau does not speak of spiritual

---

114 It is standard to use the terms director/directee in the Christian practice of spiritual direction, particularly in the Catholic tradition. But other terms are also used. For a short discussion see: Janet Ruffing, “The Problem with Terminology,” in To Tell The Sacred Tale, Spiritual Direction and Narrative (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 18,19. Also, note that for the purpose of this thesis the focus is on individual spiritual direction. Group spiritual direction is outside the scope of this work, though in Chapter Three it may be seen that some of the community work has some features in common with group spiritual direction.

115 In their mission statement Spiritual Directors International states: “Throughout human history, individuals have been called to accompany others seeking the Mystery we name God. In this time, Spiritual Directors International responds to this call by tending the holy around the world and across traditions.” http://sdiworld.org. (accessed February 12, 2013).

116 Maureen McDonnell, “The Tension Between the Professional and Vocational Dimensions of Spiritual Direction Ministry: Contemporary Challenges Facing the Supervisor of Spiritual Directors” (DMin diss., Toronto School of Theology and University of Toronto, 2005), 62.


direction in her thesis, she is aware that the phase transition to whom she calls people, will require the aid of those gifted and trained in the ways of the spirit. She writes that “we will need religiously sensitive people, contemplatives, to help (humanity) through the phase transition, people who will devote the time and effort necessary to break down the barriers and inhibitions that prevent Light and Presence from coming through.”

Contemplative stance is the basic posture the director holds for the directee. It observes the sacred in creation and acknowledges the mystery we may call God in all aspects of ordinary life, waiting upon the divine for instruction and illumination while providing a place of safety to explore the full depth of humanity. Contemplative stance within the tradition of spiritual direction is often described as “taking a long loving look at the real.” It combines the ‘doing’ of attentiveness and self-emptying, and yet, is in essence, a ‘being’, wherein grace may descend upon the passive recipient. The contemplative stance is void of opinions, attitudes and agendas. It is a place of concentrated faith in the other, with a deep respect for the individual human consciousness. Norvene Vest, a spiritual director steeped in the Benedictine tradition, observes that if the practice “is authentic, the growing relationship with the sacred that emerges from the companionship of spiritual direction will influence the seeker’s (directee’s) way of being in the world” for “spiritual direction or ‘tending the holy’ is always an applied art: it is directed toward a transformed life.”

The “transformed life” Vest suggests may emerge from spiritual direction, and “the paradigm shifts and transformations required to invent a new kind of earth community” that FitzGerald proposes, require a platform rich in intuitive understandings and free of doctrinal

119 Bruteau, 98.
121 Vest, ed., Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions, ix.
The practice and experience of contemplative stance, which involves an encounter with the mystery of the sacred, provides this platform from which humanity is seen as a tapestry of interwoven relationships. Janet Ruffing claims “it is this deepest level of encounter with the Holy Mystery in which we experience the essential unity of the love of neighbor and the love of God, the essential interrelatedness of all that is.” Merton, who seemingly held most of his Trappist career in the posture of contemplation, writes extensively of its gifts in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*. He sees the practicing of contemplation as essential for all people wishing to move intentionally towards a peaceful world, and the holding of its steady posture as the only hope for sustaining and nurturing humanity. His lyrical opening to his meditation on contemplation attempts to write about what he freely admits, defies description.

Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is a spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith. For contemplation is a kind of spiritual vision to which both reason and faith aspire, by their very nature, because without it they must always remain incomplete. Yet contemplation is not vision because it sees “without seeing” and knows “without knowing”. It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words or even in clear concepts. . .

Contemplation is always beyond our own knowledge, beyond our own light, beyond systems, beyond explanations, beyond discourse, beyond dialogue, beyond our own self.

Though the contemplative stance may be “beyond systems, beyond explanations, beyond discourse” it can be approached by the practice of certain spiritual disciplines. In this thesis the

---

term spiritual discipline has a particular meaning that refers to the opening of one’s spirit to the working of God, or the placing of oneself in the way of grace, grace as unmerited gift of spiritual understanding. Henri Nouwen writes:

In the spiritual life, the word discipline means ‘the effort to create some space in which God can act.’ Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you are not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you had not planned or counted on.

Discipline, then, is not a punitive affair. In Christianity it involves a renewed understanding of the authority of Christ, motivated by a desire for a deeper understanding of the love of his way and a desire to respond to the needs of others. Ultimately, the purpose of practicing certain spiritual disciplines is to improve our ‘sight’, that is to begin to see past the misconceptions presented by the culture, to another reality which may include the five senses, but is beyond them. Richard Rohr, writes, that “all spiritual disciplines have one purpose: to get rid of illusions so we can be present. These disciplines exist so that we can see what is, see who we are, and see what is happening. On the contrary, our mass cultural trance is like scales over our eyes. We see only with the material eye.” The contemplative stance, in its attempt to help remove these scales, employs the three spiritual disciplines of attentiveness, resistance and self-emptying, which allows for the practicing of the fourth discipline, that of discernment.

It should be noted, however, that though the development of these disciplines is of vital importance, as Merton wisely cautions, the inner life cannot be summoned into existence by mere discipline, nor tricked into revealing its wisdom and direction by our adherence to a certain

process. What spiritual practices can do, Merton suggests, “is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart, and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestations of his (its) presence.” Spiritual disciplines may be likened to tools that are used gently and reverently, in the loosening of the soil around our often impacted, intransigent thinking, in the hope that we will begin to live with “the mind in the heart” and allow new growth to emerge.

The first discipline in learning to hold a contemplative stance is the practice of attentiveness. Here begins what Nouwen refers to as the “creating of space in which something can happen that you had not planned or counted on.” Attentiveness allows for the waking up of the spirit. Anthony de Mello maintains that attentiveness and the awareness that comes from it is the heart of spirituality, and “spirituality means waking up.” Attentiveness, as a celestial alarm clock, is not necessarily easy or often practiced in a culture that measures value by quantitative production. To begin with, attentiveness takes time. To the uninitiated, this time may seem wasted. But the point of attentiveness is to draw forward the inner life, the awakened life, that which “communicates a new intelligence in which it lives, so that it becomes a living awareness of itself: and this awareness is not so much something that we ourselves have, as something that we are. It is a new and indefinable quality of our living being.”

This awareness, this ‘new intelligence’, is best accessed through a quiet mind and body, for

---

135 Tilden Edwards, “The Gift of Open Awareness: Living with the Mind in the Heart” in *Embracing the Call to Spiritual Depth, Gifts for Contemplative Living* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 3-57. Edwards speaks of the practice of drawing the mind down into the heart, his way of explaining the process of contemplative prayer.
136 Mary Margaret Funk, O.S.B., “Introduction, A Garden Where Tools Matter,” in *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 1-4. Funk’s book is an extended metaphor where the garden is the soul and the garden tools are various spiritual practices.
in stillness the wisdom of the body is provided a medium for expression. In the practice of spiritual direction, the director begins the session with a period of quietness. Calming the fidgeting of the body, breathing deeply, closing the eyes to outside distractions, the ritual of lighting a candle—all these actions and others may be used by the director to calm the often frantic mind and equally agitated body of both themselves and the directee.

This calm place begins with an outer, physical stillness, but more importantly, it is an inner stillness, a deliberate slowing down of what the Buddhists refer to as ‘monkey mind’, a mind jumping from thought to thought, swinging from past to present, but unable to rest quietly in the moment. Silence, so often overlooked as an essential ingredient to the wellness of the soul, is an extension of stillness. This silence is not so much an absence of sound, but an awareness of presence, of being completely alive to the nuance of each moment. One of the long practiced methods of drawing attention to the present moment is through a concentration on our breathing. Tilden Edwards, who writes extensively on the Christian practice of centering prayer, sees the breath as both a vehicle to attentiveness, and a further understanding of our interconnectedness. He writes,

> Breath is invisible to the naked eye, yet it is very real and powerful. It cleanses, enlivens, and calms us. It cannot be confined to one place. It has a dynamic quality of movement, drawing on the air that pervades us inside and out. Breath reveals the illusion in any sense of ultimate self-isolation and separateness: we are always drawing it into us and returning it, demonstrating the fluidity of our embodiment, its literal interdependence with the rest of life. Breath is our breath, and yet it is not: it is air that we cannot possess. Such physical

---

realities help us to understand the subtle intimacy of our human-divine interconnectedness.¹³⁸

Margaret Guenther in her analogy of spiritual direction as midwifery emphasizes the importance of the first stage of spiritual transformation as a parallel to the beginning of the contractions of labour, defining it as a time of waiting, patience and self-restraint. “Above all, it is a time of receptivity and a time for patience. This may go against the grain in our impatient, result-oriented society, but effort at this point is counterproductive.”¹³⁹ Passivity in our culture is often seen as slothful. People are incited to be the instigator, the initiator of activity, to take control of their lives. But attentiveness requires a simple willingness to resist moving forward mentally, to rest quietly, to attend to the situation and/or persons in one’s surroundings, but not to impose anything upon them. It requires observing and regarding, but without moving toward specific ideas, however elevated.¹⁴⁰ Waiting with an open mind invites humility, for it insists that any one person does not have all the answers, and further more, is not required to have them. As Thomas Keating wisely comments regarding the birth of attentiveness, “The chief act of the will is not effort but consent.”¹⁴¹

Gerald May, a psychiatrist deeply concerned with both spirituality and mental health,

¹⁴² Tilden Edwards, Living in the Presence, Spiritual Exercises to Open our Lives to the Awareness of God (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 21. Italics are Edward’s. This book, as the subtitle suggests, is a how-to treatise on the practice of attentiveness leading to awareness. As in all of Edwards’s writings, it is infused with the spirit of one who lives what he writes.


¹⁴⁴ Simone Weil practiced the art of waiting in emptiness from the time she was a child. This ‘waiting in emptiness’ or as she later extrapolated to ‘waiting for God’ is a main theme in her writings. She writes: “Above all, our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive, in its naked truth, the object that is to penetrate it. Many errors are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search. We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them.” Simone Weil, Waiting for God, trans. Emma Craufurd, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 111–112.

maintains that most people are living unaware of themselves and their surroundings, and thus unable to understand their life in any kind of sane manner. He maintains that attentiveness is the beginning of consciously sane living for it leads to awareness, which in its simplest form is appreciation of the moment. However, this gentle awareness, though focused on the moment, is not the same as the common admonishment to ‘pay attention’. In fact is it is quite the opposite.

May writes:

In paying attention some things are blocked out so that awareness can be focused on one thing. In attentiveness, nothing is blocked. One is open to all that is. One can try to keep as sharply aware as possible, in all the things one does—not so that one can be in better control, but just to see. In order to nurture this attentiveness, one must find a way of being relaxed and alert simultaneously. At the time this may seem like going against old habits, in which relaxation means dullness and alertness means tension. But relaxing with bright awareness can happen. And one might do well to encourage it.

This “relaxing with bright awareness” is the beginning of the “tending of the holy,” the allowing one’s self to be open to the wholeness of all things. And Bruteau, along with May, encourages this practice. With the stilling of the body, the consciousness of the breath, the intentional waiting with no regard to outcome, the awake, yet relaxed attitude of being present in the moment, comes a new way of seeing, open to possibility. And as Bruteau would attest, the opening to new possibilities is a key element to the larger shift of worldview in which humanity must participate. Bruteau stresses the importance of each person taking responsibility for seeing for themselves the way things are, for having their own experience of God, not relying on being told, or having impressions forced upon them. All substantial change must begin with personal awareness, for until an individual is awake to what is going on around them, he or she is unable to see past the complications of the moment and imagine alternate possibilities.

143 May, Simple Sane, The Spirituality of Mental Health, 111.
144 Bruteau, “You Have to Do It Yourself,” in The Holy Thursday Revolution, 76-78.
But humans are complex creatures, and the opening of new possibilities also brings with it the fear of uncertainty. The practice of the discipline of resistance is now required. Resistance in the context of contemplative stance refers to the refusal to assume standard human assumptions, judgments, and anxieties. After the stilling of attentiveness, the important practice of resistance leaves open the spiritual space that has been created and allows for the opportunity of mystical experience. Mystical experience is an encounter or acquaintance with the sacred that results in an altered state of consciousness or a deepening of our understanding of the reality that surrounds us. Dorothee Soelle, a Protestant theologian studying and teaching in Germany after the Holocaust, claims that “mysticism is resistance,” and it may be considered, according to Soelle’s intense exploration of the subject in her book *The Silent Cry*, that resistance leads to mysticism. Soelle defines mysticism not as a fantastic otherworldly experience of God, “but a different relationship with the world—one that has borrowed the eyes of God.” Mystical experience happens, according to Soelle when we move past our self imposed limits and into a place of endless creativity.

Mysticism in its truest sense is not a fanciful excursion from this world, but a hunkering down into it, a deepening understanding of both our own selves and the universe as a holy temple. As Teiliard de Chardin once prayed, “Let us leave the surface and without leaving the world, plunge into God.” Mysticism, for Soelle, and others, is an encounter with the collective unity of things, thus granting experiential knowledge of universal interconnectedness. “It is the force that urges onward, the dynamic that presses toward the unification of everything that is

---

separated.”  

When a person resists that which seems personally irresistible, mystical experience may ensue, and with it, the spiritual freedom that stretches the mind past its limited horizons. Here is what Soelle would called ‘lived immanence’, wherein God pervades and sustains. But always, something must be given up, something must die, for this birth to take place. She writes,

Lived immanence is not what is left behind for the sake of fantastic transcendence: rather, a new relation of transcendence and immanence is sought after wherein immanence is no longer too dense, too sealed up, and beyond reproducing itself in a trivial round. It is to be an immanence that opens itself to transcendence and takes part in it. But how is that to happen without exiting from the familiar, without un-becoming or dying off?

In practicing contemplative stance, resistance begins with the intention to refrain from conditioned patterns that generally fall into three categories. First, there is the abstaining from habitual judgments, condemnations, preferences, and criticisms, either internally directed, or externally, toward another person, group or situation. Personal addictions or emotional inclinations are to be held in check. This assumes a habit of self-examination able to acknowledge tendencies that may cause separation. In spiritual direction, it is of utmost importance that the directee knows they are in a place of safety, free to speak of intimate matters. This requires an absence of criticism, either overt or implied. When personal prejudices are laid aside, whether in spiritual direction, or general conversation, the commonality of the human condition can more easily be acknowledged and honoured.

---

150 Soelle, 113.
151 Soelle, 29.
153 Joann Wolski Conn, “Spiritual Formation,” *Theology Today* 56 (April 1999): 86-97. Conn writes, “Most great spiritual teachers affirm that self-knowledge is the root of discernment and authentic prayer . . .Spiritual as well as psychological maturity is a process of coming into our true self so that we have a self to give away . . .It is losing the kind of self that is unwilling to question even our deepest meaning of self and others,” 96.
154 Sue Magrath, “Compassion for the Wounded Soul: Addressing Child Sexual Abuse in Spiritual Direction,” *Presence* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 19-27. “Participation in meaningful spiritual practice without a sense of safety is extraordinarily difficult. A spiritual director’s primary task in this situation is to help those whom they companion to find a safe place that can make an experience of God possible.” 23.
Secondly, there is the resisting of imposing categories on individuals or situations. In the current ethos of efficiency, this is often done so naturally, it takes effort and concentration to resist cataloguing people, however compassionately, into groups—the poor, the afflicted, the mentally ill, the rich, the educated, the talented. When people are deposited into tidy boxes labeled with preconceived ideas as to their identity, the blindness to their true selves prevents seeing through “the borrowed eyes of God.” Further, it keeps the viewer equally boxed up. The practice of spiritual direction considers the unique aspects of each person, seeing both their gifts and challenges as God given clues leading to the discovery of their deeper selves. Any form of categorizing negates the individual and prevents this resonant work. In common conversation the labeling of people into groups re-enforces the domination paradigm based on separation and alienation. Bruteau places particular emphasis on this kind of resistance, for it bars the way forward to mutual indwelling. The object, she proposes, is an awareness of our own transcendence beyond description so as to become aware of our profound connection to others. In understanding our own sense of incalculable worth, we simultaneously understand ourselves to be “intimately entwined with all these other uniquely precious beings.” And here, Bruteau insists, is the point of self-hood—to know that it is established by mutual affirmation, not

---

156 Jürgen Moltmann, a German contemporary of Soelle’s, who also struggled to make sense of Christian theology post-Holocaust, writes that “resistance to the power of closing oneself against the other, of corroborating oneself and repeating oneself is necessarily part of the mediating anticipation of what is to come.” Moltmann understands hope for the future of humanity as dependent on our ability to resist confirming a limited view of others. Jürgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 194.
158 Jean Vanier, who lives and works with people with developmental disabilities, writes, “The point of inclusion is the belief that each of us is important, unique, sacred. We can only relate to others and begin to include them in our lives and our society if we have this primary belief. That means that we bring each other birth as we respect and love one another and as our value is revealed to us through the love of others.” Becoming Human, (Toronto: Anansi, 1998), 95.
159 Bruteau, 176
negation.\textsuperscript{160}

Thirdly, there must be a resistance to rely on education, skills, and expertise as the superior source of knowing. While study and experience are important to offer in service to another, these human accomplishments are only part of the equation. In any given set of circumstances there are many unknowns. Comfort with uncertainty allows flexibility.\textsuperscript{161} This implies also a resistance to holding intellectual knowledge as superior to more intuitive ways of acquiring understanding. Mary Anne Scofield, one of the founding members of Spiritual Directors International, states that “no amount of theological training or programs in spiritual direction can ever substitute for the surrendered heart that maintains such a contemplative stance, always with an ear toward God’s sweet song—or at least toward the sometimes dim memory of it. . . Without such a steady, earthy, open, welcoming embrace of life, spiritual direction is impossible.”\textsuperscript{162} Bruteau would add here, that that any attempt to understand the communion paradigm while unwilling to acknowledge the presence and possibility of the myriad ways of knowing will be futile.

In the practice of spiritual direction, the resistance that allows for mystical understanding is essential to the work of aiding another in their spiritual journey.\textsuperscript{163} Once the quiet work of attentiveness draws the director and directee into a place of awareness, resistance offers a metaphorical chair to the divine spirit who is the real director in all encounters with another.


\textsuperscript{161} Briege O’Hare, exploring the developing of relationship with God in spiritual direction writes, “To help each other answer the call to intimacy with God, faith communities must let go of a culture of certainty and embrace the wilderness of searching.” This is not only true of faith communities, but true of life in general. There must be resistance to the devotion to knowing all, and a move towards wondering, wandering and, as Rilke would say, “learning to live into the questions.” Briege O’Hare, “Opening to Love: A Paradigm for Grown in Relationship with God,” \textit{Presence} 1, no. 2 (June 2004): 27-36.

\textsuperscript{162} Mary Ann Scofield, “Waiting on God,” in \textit{Sacred is the Call}, 53.

\textsuperscript{163} Maureen Conroy and Ignatius, “Spiritual Direction as Fostering Our Relationship with God,” in \textit{The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God} (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 75–91.
Inviting the Holy One into the session, creates a triad from a duo.\textsuperscript{164} By resisting imposing his or her will, and instead opening up the space in a gesture of hospitality, an experience of divine intent is made possible. This is the basis upon which all spiritual direction is done. Here the director will be doing the work they are called to do, which is to aid God in the transformation of another as they journey towards a fuller understanding of the divine in their own life. Within spiritual direction, this allows for the courage to ‘touch the holy’ as it is called. In a session with a directee, the director may feel drawn to a place of sorrow or anger. When the director has done the hard work of resisting, thus allowing the spirit of wisdom to do the directing, there is the courage to wade into deep and even seemingly dangerous territory, working with God, in service to the spiritual welfare of the other.

In the larger landscape of worldview, it may be said that resistance on a personal level yields the mystical experience of divine intervention that in turn grants the courage to practice resistance in the wider social/political arena. Rodger Gottlieb, in his explorative work \textit{A Spirituality of Resistance} writes, “A spirituality of resistance, while recognizing the importance of working on ourselves, also directs us toward outer examination, outer transformation and the pursuit of justice in the world.”\textsuperscript{165} William James, in his \textit{Varieties of Religious Experiences}, concluded after extensive investigation that experiences of the divine nature often result not only in a more loving affection for others, but an abundance of courage that may lead to heroic acts.\textsuperscript{166} This brings us back to Soelle’s statement that “mysticism is resistance” by which she means to suggest that encounters with God, having granted a knowledge of the wholeness of life may also grant the courage needed to resist the fragmentation and separateness characteristic of the

\textsuperscript{164} The symbol of Spiritual Directors International is that of three chairs in a semi-circle, one for the director, one for the directee, and one for the divine spirit.
\textsuperscript{165} Rodger Gottlieb, \textit{A Spirituality of Resistance} (New York: Crossroads, 1999), 13.
domination paradigm. As Bruteau makes clear in her own writing, both understanding our wholeness and abundant courage will be needed if the shifting in human consciousness is to be completed. And experiences of God, grant both. Bruteau writes,

What we are to do is to open ourselves to hearing the Voice, seeing the truth, knowing how it is with us, that we are born of the Spirit and therefore find ourselves “in” one another and feeding one another in mutual positive regard. . . .We need to know that we are so much more than we usually think we are, so much deeper and so much freer, so much more able to manifest God-as-world. This conviction and the confidence need to become our ground consciousness, the place from which we think and feel and act.\textsuperscript{167}

If attentiveness offers us loving awareness, and resisting the broad onslaught of our fears and prejudices grants divine experience, then the discipline of self-emptying offers holy intimacy, the fruitful medium in which rebirth may begin. Self-emptying provides a hospitable space in order that our truest life may unfold, the life imagined, engineered, and created by divine will. This true life, by virtue of the fact that it is one and the same with divine will, has as its focus service to ‘the other’. This emptying of the self is “by no means the same thing as emptiness or ‘the void’. On the contrary, it is the necessary prerequisite for becoming the ‘vessel of election’, for being powerfully filled with grace and love.”\textsuperscript{168} For those of the Christian faith this means following in the footsteps of Christ, whose love “demands and appropriates all.”\textsuperscript{169} Or it may well be seen as a leaning toward the gentle voice of the sacred who calls individuals into presence, offering the treasure of true vocation as humans and the invitation of partnership in the unfolding drama of all heavenly and earthly matters, of which the great sacred mystery is a prime participant.

Self-emptying as holy intimacy is mission work in the truest sense of the word, a journey

\textsuperscript{167} Bruteau, 77
\textsuperscript{168} Bernard Haring, \textit{The Virtues of an Authentic Life, A Celebration of Spiritual Maturity} (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori, 1997), 137.
into the vast wilderness of the centre of being. In order to respond one needs to stand open and
unknowing, giving up all claims to personal ambitions, religious traditions, opinions, ideas, and
intellectual ideologies. It is to wait in poverty, in a stance of quiet contemplation, allowing
nothing to interfere with the incoming of the Holy One who leads and directs. In spiritual
direction, this self-emptying is practiced by the director as part of their service to the directee.
But it is advantageous for the directee also to attend to self-emptying as much as is possible. It is
hard to receive gifts with hands clenched. It is hard to receive new vision with eyes and will shut
against them. But if one is willing to stand in emptiness the gift is intimacy with the divine one,
the finding of our ‘soul mate’.

In Christology, self-emptying refers to the emptying out of Christ’s divinity in order that he
might take on human form. In both classical and modern Christian thought, and corresponding
discipleship in the church, Christ’s self emptying, or kenosis, as it is called, has often been
interpreted as the model for Christians to empty themselves of their concerns in order to follow
Christ, both figuratively and actually tying an apron around their waists to serve humanity. These
understandings are not wrong in and of themselves, merely incomplete, and lacking the breadth
of creativity and passion that flows from a self-emptying newly defined and reimagined. Hans
Urs Von Balthasar, a German theologian who approached matters with the mind of a mystic and
the sensibilities of a devotee of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, spoke “of the divine in Christ

170 “We cannot become our true selves apart from God. The only way for anyone to become his or her true
self is to engage consciously in the relationship with God that God desires. If I engage in that relationship honestly, I
cannot but face all those false selves that hinder me from being my true self. God creates me to be God’s ‘soul
mate,’ another way perhaps to define what it means to be made in the image of God.” William Barry, SJ, “Our True
Selves and Spiritual Direction,” Presence 17, no. 2 (June 2011): 6-10.
171 Phil 2:5–11.
172 See Chapter Two, page 51 for explanation of the Spiritual Exercises and appropriate citings.
precisely in terms of the very human pattern and activity of Jesus’ life.”

Balthasar “seeks an interpretation of the Incarnation which guarantees the full, inclusive and shareable humanity of Jesus. His solution is a concept of mission which discovers the centre point of human existence in an act of loving that always carries one being into communion with another.” Of importance to Balthasar is the idea that one’s calling, or mission in life, has its source in divine intimacy, humanity’s life in God being its true vocation. Personal calling, while transforming in the deepest recess of the spirit, entails a movement out into the world, for like Christ’s calling, and all divinely inspired vocations, the purpose of divine mission is to be in service to the other. In Balthasar’s beautifully poetical work, *Heart of the World*, he writes:

> Thus do we live from God: he draws us mightily into his glowing core and robs us with his lordliness of every centre that is not his own. But we are not God, and, in order the more mightily to show us the power of his centre, he hurls us out imperiously - not alone, not powerless, but endowed with our own centre and in the power of his mission. God claims us jealously; he wants us solely for his honour. But, laden with his love and living from his honour, he sends us back into the world…And perhaps the going forth from God is still more divine than the return home to God, since the greatest thing is not for us to know God and reflect this knowledge back to him as if we were gleaming mirrors, but for us to proclaim God as burning torches proclaim the light.

Merton sees self-emptying as increasing “the intensity and simplicity of a man’s love for God and for his fellow men.” Merton argues for further emphasis on “a discipline that reaches down into (our) inmost ground and opens out to the invisible, intangible, but never the less mysteriously sensible reality of God’s presence, of his love, and of his activity in our hearts.” He sees this inward journey as the place where we ourselves are revealed. To discipline oneself to wait in quiet contemplation for the movement of God is to come to know oneself at the same...

---

174 McIntosh, *Christology from Within, Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar* 54.
177 Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 112.
time one comes to know God.

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. But whatever is in God is really identical with Him, for His infinite simplicity admits no division and no distinction. Therefore I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in Him. Ultimately the only way that I can be myself is to become identified with Him in whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence. Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: To discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him.\textsuperscript{178}

In discovering the true self, the wholeness of the universe and the love that binds everyone together is revealed. Merton calls this the ‘mystical person’. When an individual comes into the experience of their true selves, they are drawn into the powerful stream of divine love that pulls them towards others in service. This is because our true selves, being given to us by God, are aligned with God’s will, and thus in coming into our own identity, we want what God wants. “The reason for this overflow of the contemplative dimension into the realm of action lies in the very nature of that deepened relationship with God which – rooted and grounded in love – cannot be confined but involves a participation in the loving work of God.”\textsuperscript{179}

This can be terrifying for those attempting to follow where this unpredictable path may lead. Thus, Ignatius of Loyola’s emphasis on the importance of what he called ‘indifference’,
one of the basic teachings in his *Spiritual Exercises*.\(^{180}\) Loyola, a soldier before he became a priest and the founder of the *Society of Jesus*, or *Jesuits* as they came to be called, developed the *Spiritual Exercises* to help both religious and lay people follow more closely the way of Jesus.\(^{181}\)

The *Exercises*, a reflection of both Ignatius’ military background and his own conversion experience, are composed of specific steps taken over a period of thirty days, though Ignatius, exhibiting a modern sensibility, also offered suggestions for a less vigorous approach.\(^{182}\) In his First Principle and Foundation of the *Exercises*, annotation 23, he writes,

---

\(^{180}\) Loyola was born into the Spanish nobility at the end of the fifteenth century against a background of intense renewed spirituality that would eventual split the existing church, resulting in The Reformation. Ignatius, charming and self-seeking by his own admission, was headed for a life as a knight and courtier when he was injured in battle. In his year-long convalescence he had much time to ponder, both his romantic dreams of chivalry and the life of Jesus and the saints. He made a decision to abandon his grandiose dreams of romantic chivalry and instead follow in Christ’s footsteps. Keeping the soldier’s tradition of an all night prayer vigil before devoting oneself to service, he made a pilgrimage to Montserrat where he vowed to follow thereafter a life of chastity and devotion to the things of the spirit. He spent a year at Manresa, serving the sick and poor, praying, doing penance, and writing his Spiritual Exercises, which would later come to be the basis for the spirituality that has developed in his name. He went on to further educate himself, establishing the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1539. For a chronology of the life of Ignatius of Loyola and an original translation of *The Spiritual Exercises* as written by Ignatius see: Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J, (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2000.) For a current reading on *The Exercises*, acknowledging feminine and ecological insights sensitive to today’s context, see: John J English, S. J., *Spiritual Freedom, From an Experience of the Ignatius Exercises to the Art of Spiritual Guidance, 2nd Edition* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995).

\(^{181}\) At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is service, a devotion Ruffing writes is for “the transformation of society as well as of the hearts and minds of individuals.” 104 Janet Ruffing, “Ignatian Mystic of Service, Ignatius of Loyola and Pedro Arrupe,” in *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Press, 2001), 104-128.

\(^{182}\) With remarkably post-modern sensibilities, Ignatius chose to let the newly formed Jesuit order pray on their own, rather than in ‘choir’ as was the medieval practice; wear the dress of the local clergy, rather than that of their order; and personalize their penitential practices, as opposed to having obligatory penances. He encouraged them to travel, to teach, and to both serve and challenge the social and political systems in which they lived. In doing so he set in motion a kind of spirituality that concerned itself with individual transformation at the same time its purpose was to prepare those undertaking it to live on the front lines of the Christian faith as ‘contemplatives in action.’ In the spirit of Ignatius, and in response to the current interest in all matters spiritual, the *Exercises* are undergoing renewed interest, along with further interpretation. Two treatments are of particular interest. For an approach more accessible to women see: Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). For an approach embracing current interests in evolutionary spirituality inspired by Teilhard de Chardin and incorporating Bruteau’s theology, see: Louis M. Savary, *The New Spiritual Exercises, in the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010). As well, Margaret Self offers a poetic interpretation of the *Exercises* in *Inner Compass, An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999) as well as a poetic prose on decision making based on Ignatian spirituality in *Wise, Choices, A Spiritual Guide to Making Life’s Decisions* (New York: BlueBridge, 2004). For a brief look at some of the main principles of the *Exercises* as interpreted through Ignatius’ life story, see: Margaret Self, “Meet the Guide,” in *Landmarks, an Ignatian Journey* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003): 21-42; for a brief overview of the *Exercises* as a pilgrimage of friendship, see: Victor Loh, “A Pilgrimage Through The Seasons of the Soul,” *Presence* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 28-34.
we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonour, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things. Our one desire and choice should be what is more conductive to the end for which we are created.183

Jesuit priest, Karl Rahner, points out that practicing indifference is more than just the resolution to resist hankering after a particular desire but suggests that the *Spiritual Exercises* require an indifference that makes the taking and leaving of things a personal responsibility that must be repeated daily.184 Gill Goulding, working from the thought of Rahner, emphasizes the necessity for an attentive equanimity constantly vigilant to any particulars of divine encounter to which one might become attached.185 She sees, as did Ignatius, that from the letting go of human prudence and careful reasoning, one steps onto the stage of divine surety. By giving up human particulars in the concentrated practice of indifference, one enters the arena of the universal. “From this kind of detachment, this indifference, there arises the openness to being continually available to changing situations, seeing God in and through all. It involves the tension of always being open to the leading of the spirit of God and finding rest only in this attentive mobility.”186 John English, a retreat leader of the *Exercises*, emphasizes the inherent freedom in self-emptying and indifference, and the flexibility in thought which result when these two disciplines are embraced. He offers this gem: “It is important to grasp the significance of the phrase ‘we should not prefer.’”187 The ability to be “available to changing situations,” to be free from individual preferences, and restful in “attentive mobility” are the rewards of self-emptying and the

186 Goulding, 202.
187 English, 38, 39.
practicing of indifference. Though Bruteau did not engage in conversation with the Ignatian tradition in any of her written work, her *Holy Thursday Revolution* places great emphasis on the importance of service to the other as the natural outpouring of the indwelling of God. And she would certainly applaud both the ability to adapt to changing situations and the state of being attentive mobility as valuable assets for those actively weathering the storm of the shifting paradigms.

The fourth spiritual discipline of discernment is both the natural culmination of practicing attentiveness, resistance and self-emptying, and ultimately their purpose. Mary Rose Dougherty, who writes knowledgeably on the subject, observes that:

Contemplative practices that sharpen our awareness of reality also nourish the habit of discernment. These practices can open us to the dismantling of the clutter that covers our discerning heart. They can bring us to our Centre where we live more fully in the present moment so that in any given moment we can see what there is to see and respond freshly from who we are in this moment.\(^{188}\)

Discernment, being a culmination of contemplative practices, is not a simple matter of making decisions, though certainly decision-making may emerge from the practice. Rather discernment consists of the deep listening to inner stirrings and an attentive awareness of the signs and signals around us in the world.\(^{189}\) Discernment is an alchemy of the inner life drawn outwards into the outer life by the combined urgings of the divine spirit and the circumstances of particular situations and people. It is both about our receptivity to hear and our ability to respond. Wilke and Noreen Au draw us to Henri Nouwen’s thought that “Discernment is the movement from “absurdity to obedience.” The word *absurdity* comes from the Latin *surdus*, meaning “deaf,” and

\(^{188}\) Mary Rose Dougherty, *Discernment, Path to Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 23.

the word *obedience* from the Latin *ob-audire*, meaning, “to listen.” Absurdity here refers to Martin Buber’s idea of ‘commotion’ wherein everything is available to a person but unity, either with another or with the self. And obedience here refers to a desire to move towards God, or the mystery of the spirit. Discernment then is a move from deafness to hearing, from blindness to sight, from ignorance to holy wisdom. “Holy wisdom,” Tilden Edwards tells us, “is a deep seeing of the truth and possibility of things. It is an inspired capacity for authentic sight, discernment and hope.”

The word ‘discernment’ comes from the Greek word *diaekrisis*, which means ‘to separate’ or to ‘sort out’ or ‘distinguish’. In the practice of spiritual direction, the director, holding his or her self open to the movements of God, listens intently for the distinguishing marks of divine presence in the stories of the directee’s life. Scofield speaks of the importance of the spiritual director’s listening for “the unmistakable resonance in our own hearts, (to) what is immediately and deeply attractive to us.” The director, listening simultaneously to the divine spirit and the directee’s story, is attending to this ‘resonance’ between the movements of God within themselves, and within the directee. The directee, hopefully, has also opened their hearts to hear the wisdom of the director, but also, the reverberating resonance within their own heart-felt wisdom. So it is that “discernment is both posture and process.” It holds a posture of receptivity that allows for patient waiting and keen listening but is a process that is on going, beginning with a concentrated skill that evolves into a habit, a way of being and interpreting the

---

194 Scofield, “Waiting on God,” in *Sacred is the Call*, 53.
world moment by moment.¹⁹⁶

Maureen Conroy speaks of developing a discerning heart as both an art and a skill.¹⁹⁷ This is a hospitable approach, for it embraces the mysterious element and beauty of God’s love, and yet acknowledges the concentrated skill it takes to sort through divine attention. The contemplative stance engages the art of discernment. But skill is required to become familiar with the movements and counter movements within. Ignatius devoted much of his *Spiritual Exercises* to both the discernment of spirits and the discernment of God’s will.¹⁹⁸ The discerning of spirits is concerned with the various interior movements which either draw a person towards a desire for God and his or her own authenticity or pull away from God and the development of the authentic self, or the self aligned with divine goodness and service to others.¹⁹⁹ The discerning of God’s will involves the making of choices that honour our authentic selves, the “striving to find God in all the realities of our life—the inner dimensions of our mind, heart, spirit imagination, and memory and the outer aspects of our relationships, community, work, leisure, and world.”²⁰⁰

In order to acquire the skill of discerning, Ignatius proposed what he called *The Examination of Consciousness*, or the *Examen* as it has come to be called. In the morning this consists of previewing the day ahead and asking for grace to live rightly. After lunch and in the evening, the events of the day are placed before the divine spirit for edification, the goal of the Examen being the refining of consciousness to God’s presence and action, which Dykemmann maintains is just as

¹⁹⁶ Dougherty, 5.
¹⁹⁷ Maureen Conroy, and Ignatius, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), xii. This entire book is a treasure trove. Conroy has a way of articulating the process of discernment and giving examples that brings it to life. See in particular the chapter on “Spiritual Direction as Fostering Our Relationship with God,” 75-91.
¹⁹⁹ Dougherty, 10.
valid a practice today as it was in the time of Ignatius. Whether in its original form, or adapted to more current sensibilities, The Examen can be made appropriate for all ages and circumstances and is a valuable tool for acquiring the skill of discernment.

Though the practice of discernment is well developed in Ignatian scholarship, this discipline is available to anyone who wishes to practice it. The choice of language may differ, but if the intention is to move towards a fully engaged life in service to others, then the Ignatian intention is honoured. The skill of discernment, well honed within the cloisters of Christianity, may be set at the feet of all those desiring to practice its art. For both the art and skill of discernment, emerging from the practice of contemplative stance, will be powerful navigating tools in the uncertain future that stands before humanity. Louis Savery, in his interpretation of The First Principle and Foundation, articulates what the purpose of that future might be.

You were created to make a unique contribution to the great evolutionary project initiated and continually supported by God, namely, bringing all creation together into one magnificent conscious loving union. Since all other created things in the universe share with you this common eternal destiny, they are essential to and inseparable from you as you participate in the pursuit of that on going evolutionary process. Individually and joined with others, you are to use all means available to promote and carry out this shared purpose with all your personal creativity, compassion, and energy, always seeking and choosing what is more conducive to that purpose. For this, God empowers you to grow in passionate love and care of all elements of the cosmos, since they, as you, all live and move and have their being in God’s love.

Savery’s interpretation of Ignatius’ First Principle is a good summation of the final chapter of Bruteau’s Holy Thursday Revolution, entitled, Partners with God in Creation. Having

---

201 Dyckmann, 115, from “Knowing Who I Am,” in The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women 113-149. I have given here a modern, accessible and simplified version of the General Examination of Conscience. For Ignatius’ original instructions see: Puhl, 17-20. Savory, remarks that Ignatius’ emphasis on wrong doing and sinfulness are perhaps less helpful than a focus on “praise, reverence, and gratitude.” See: Savary, The New Spiritual Exercises, in the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 49-51.

202 For a non-religious approach of the Examen for children and families, see: Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn, Sleeping with Bread, Holding What Gives you Life (New York: Paulist Press, 1995).

203 Savery, 47.

proposed her observation of a shift in world view from a domination paradigm to a communion paradigm, followed by an examination of the life of Jesus, viewed through the lens of a developing communion sensibility, she directs her closing remarks to the encouragement of those wishing to actively participate in her proposed shift of consciousness. She desires the world to be imbued with godliness, offering instructions as to the way forward. She commands: “Turn away from trying to dominate and devote yourselves to creating and nurturing. This will make the world grow, grow in the direction of increasing godliness.” Bruteau places great emphasis on the participatory nature of the shifting consciousness and the importance of experiencing the urgings of the Holy One by individuals, that humanity may come to understand itself as based on interdependence, not separation. She is adamant that this shift must come from a deep place of personal self-examination and realignment with God, lest the change be superficial and unable to withstand the strain this enormous shift will doubtlessly produce. The micro level of each person’s shifting understanding must drive the macro level of global realignment.

The contemplative stance may provide just such a spiritual Petri dish for the micro level shifts from which the larger changes may emerge. Beginning with simple awareness, one is forced to slow down and notice what is going on in the world, in one’s own particular sphere of activity, but also, in the larger arena of economics and politics. Resisting current modes of reacting quickly and automatically to preconceived ideas of ‘the way things are’, allows space for divine creativity to emerge. Self-emptying allows divine grace to expand further. The art and skill of discernment provides the mechanism for partnership with the divine will that humanity

205 Bruteau, 254.
206 Bruteau, 115.
may become God’s partner in the co-joint enterprise of ongoing evolution.\(^{207}\)

Full partnership with the divine will is Bruteau’s hope for humanity, and the direction to which her entire thesis points the individual. Contemplative stance offers a place of beginning.

\(^{207}\) Bruteau, 255.
CHAPTER THREE

In Chapter One the thought of Beatrice Bruteau was examined, concluding with her insistence that humans must take an active part in the shift towards a communion paradigm. Chapter Two suggested that the practice of contemplative stance may well offer a starting point to aid in this shift in consciousness, leading to an understanding of discernment as a nuanced approach to maneuvering through the complexities facing those living in the Western culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Chapter Three offers a brief look at four intentional community gatherings where this stance is being practiced by the leaders, and often the participants, sometimes unknowingly. These brief sketches of purposeful contemplative stance at work in particular circumstances will hopefully offer a glimmer of how a practice developed in spiritual direction may be used in a broader context to nudge people towards a communion paradigm. As Bruteau emphasis throughout her thesis, the grand shift in consciousness to which we are being called, will not be achieved by mere desiring, or believing in any particular doctrine or faith tradition. The shifts in our consciousness must happen at a deep level, and this can only be achieved by active participation. Speaking from a Christian perspective, she writes:

In a tradition that has long emphasized the virtue of believing certain propositions as salvific in itself, it is necessary to point out that the revolution we are discussing is not actually achieved that way. The realizing of being a child of God has to be one’s own indisputable conviction based on one’s own experience in order to be proof against all the ideas, images, and feeling generated by the domination culture. That is why Jesus himself says that it’s no use just listening to him and applauding, you will be blessed only if you do what he says.208

These four small ministries are an attempt to do what Jesus’ says to do—to love God and love one another—and to embrace the communion paradigm as he did. Practicing the contemplative stance is the means for doing so.

208 Bruteau, 76.
Mary’s Kitchen

Mary’s Kitchen, is an ongoing rural ministry that gathers once a month to prepare delicious food as gifts, gently experimenting with the practice of giving and receiving with loving attention. Mary’s Kitchen attempts to help people rediscover the “I-Thou” relationship, as it works to eradicate the cultural understanding of charity, as giving from one who has, to one who has not. This community endeavor includes people of all ages from a wide range of social situations, from the exceedingly wealthy to the near homeless. Most of the hands on work is done by women, though the ministry interacts and delivers to everyone in the community neighbourhood. The men who are involved tend to limit themselves to the donating of materials from their farms or delivering the prepared gifts when they are completed. Developed originally within the cloisters of the formal church, Mary’s Kitchen now provides a way of working spiritually in a community that is suspect of formal religion, and often sees religious language, or its reference, as divisive and unnecessary. Language aside, Mary’s Kitchen follows closely the hospitality of Jesus Christ as he worked and served in his community, allowing for the kind of

209 Mary’s Kitchen is a good example of ‘contemplation in action’, or as Soelle would say, ‘mysticism and activity’, the former engendering the later. Soelle writes, “The point is neither to practice an introverted mysticism nor to engage in an extroverted critique of the age alone, but to find one’s vita mixtaiin this sense between contemplation and activity . . . The combination of contemplating and acting is rooted in the mystical understanding of the relationship to God as a mutuality of receiving and giving, “What we have gathered in contemplation we give out in love,” says Eckhart.” Soelle, The Silent Cry, 201.

210 Martin Buber was a German born, Israeli philosopher and writer who focused on the idea of existence as encounter, in what he termed the ‘I – Thou,’ as opposed to the ‘I – It’ relationship. This thesis is contained in his most famous book, Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970). He writes, “Community is the being no longer side by side, and, one might add, this multitude, though it moves toward one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turn to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from the ‘I to Thou,’” 201. For a discussion of the ‘I-Thou’ in community see: Martin Buber, “Community is the Being,” in The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

211 “All over the world, people are finding that in their dramatically transformed circumstances, the old forms of faith no longer work for them: they cannot provide the enlightenment and consolation that human beings seem to need. As a result, men and women are trying to find new was of being religious; like the reformers and prophets of the Axial Age, they are attempting to build upon the insights of the past in a way that will take human beings forward into the new world they have created for themselves.” Karen Armstrong, The Battle for God (NewYork: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2000), xiv-xv. In her book, particularly the introduction and first two chapters, Armstrong addresses the difficulties with the current misunderstandings in the word ‘God’.
inclusive fellowship gatherings which are a trademark of his teaching. The gatherings take place in a variety of private homes where it is discerned there is a calming spirit. In addition, much preparation is done in advance to free the day from unnecessary confusion or hurry. The careful advance work with menus, recipes, lists of participants, and thoughtful consideration as to recipients, is imperative background effort.

Each gathering begins with a quiet time of welcome, orientation, and informal conversation. This is followed by a half hour of specific teaching incorporating the principles of attentiveness, self-emptying, resistance and discernment as described in Chapter Two. The focus is always around a short reading that speaks of our connectedness, encouraging an understanding of the emerging communion paradigm. Though the chosen readings may be within a formally religious context, they are just as likely to be chosen from science, politics, literature, or popular culture. A recent focus for the morning contemplation was from Vaclav Havel, the activist, playwright and former president of the Czech Republic. He writes:

It is I who must begin. Once I begin, once I try—here and now, right where I am, not excusing myself by saying that things would be easier elsewhere, without grand speeches and ostentatious gestures, but all the more persistently—to live in harmony with the ‘voice of being’, as I understand it within myself— as soon as I begin that, I suddenly discover, to my surprise, that I am neither the only one, nor the first, nor the most important one to have set out upon that road . . .Whether all is really lost or not depends entirely on whether or not I am lost.  

A seasonal newsletter informing the neighbourhood of gathering dates and locations also offers thoughts for further contemplation, all with an aim to encourage reflection on the way things are, and a vision of how they might be. A recent newsletter included this quote and suggestion.

Rainer Maria Rilke, the German poet wrote, “As once the winged energy of delight carried you over childhood's dark abysses, now beyond your own life build the great arch of unimagined bridges.” Here at Mary’s Kitchen, this is what we are attempting to do—to

---

212 Vaclav Havel, as quoted in Teaching with Fire: Poetry that sustains the Courage To Teach, Sam M. Intrator and Megan Scribner, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 188.
build as yet unimagined bridges. Come and be part of our engineering outfit and see what imaginings we might build together.\textsuperscript{213}

The challenges of Mary’s Kitchen illustrate the uneven landscape of the post-modern context, where frantic activity is often the measure of the day, rather than love.\textsuperscript{214} To begin with, it is difficult to simply slow people down and ask them to do less, and be more attentive to each task. Accustomed to a production line mentality, where quantity sold is the final measure of success, it takes a deliberate pulling back of the pace to teach people to do things slowly and carefully. For example, when asked to put stickers on containers, a person will rush through the job in order to be finished and ‘on to the next task’. A teaching on the simple act of putting labels on a bottle of soup, with care, thoughtfulness and good intentions for the receiver appeared as quite a revelation to many women. Setting up specific applications of the practice of attentiveness is an effective tool for the instruction of this spiritual principle. The ‘doing’ of awareness practice allows for its experience. The continual modeling of being aware of our own needs is necessary as well. Participants are invited to find a quiet spot in the garden or by the fire to rest. But in a worldview where what we accomplish is what we are worth, it is an uphill battle. What is noted is that those who are the most accomplished in a worldly way, have the most difficulty slowing down and being attentive to themselves, and to others.

Modeling the breaking down of established categories of who is ‘needy’ is another learning curve. As we live in a culture measured by economics, who is in need is seen as who is

\textsuperscript{213} Mary’s Kitchen Fall Newsletter, 2012.

\textsuperscript{214} “Love is the measure,” was Dorothy Day’s favorite saying, repeated often in her autobiography, The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1952, 1981). Day was the co-founder, along with Peter Maurin, of The Catholic Worker Movement. Though Mary’s Kitchen is not part of this movement, still, much of Day’s thinking influences it. Day, writing in The Catholic Worker, a newspaper she created and edited, wrote: “We have not yet begun to learn about love. Now is the time to begin, to start afresh, to use this divine weapon.” Dorothy Day, "Love Is The Measure," The Catholic Worker, June 1946, 2. The Catholic Worker Movement. http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/Reprint2.cfm?TextID=425. (accessed December, 2006).
financially disadvantaged. A recent gift to an affluent couple brought an outpouring of appreciative tears and an effusive thank you note wondering how anyone could have known of their loneliness and sense of separation from the community. As the leaders of Mary’s Kitchen work intuitively to discern who in the community might be needing attention, and encourage participants to offer suggestions of their own, this turns regular categories upside down. This can be met with grumbling, or a need to know ‘why’. As the specific need may be a private or even an unknown one, participants are challenged to move into the uncertain territory of disintegrating boundaries between people. This has engendered interesting conversation, but also, unintentionally hurtful words. If the leaders are not working from a steady contemplative stance, dialogue can degenerate quickly.215 Here the practice of resistance comes into play, for any inclination to teach with an admonishment or correction may destroy the opportunity for circumstances in combination with divine grace to offer the instruction at a deeper level than words. Discernment is on going. Goulding speaks of the necessity of developing a “genuine docility to the Spirit of God” and certainly at Mary’s Kitchen the leaders strive to achieve this ‘docility’ as they balance the wellness of the group, while creating space for divine exploration, and for people to discover their own internal wisdom.216

And then, there are the occasions when delivered gifts are refused. Sometimes this is due to fearfulness, for in our culture we have bred a great distrust of surprise, even when it is a lovely

---

215 The leadership of Mary’s Kitchen is shared between Alissa Price-Allen, myself, and whoever is the host in each particular gathering. Alissa works as an interpreter for the deaf and a doula. She has prodigious skills of listening and her gracious presence keeps everything running smoothly. We have divided up the physical and organizational chores between us, but the spiritual work we do in tandem. I do the teaching in the morning, as Alissa does not like to take this place of leadership, but we choose together the readings, the recipients of the gifts, and work throughout the day to keep one another centered. Alissa and I work closely with the host, choosing people that are open to our intuitive approach and have natural gifts of spiritual hospitality.

216 Gill Goulding, Creative Perseverance: Sustaining Life-Giving Ministry in Today’s Church, 127. Goulding writes: “Genuine docility to the Spirit of God is an art that is learned only in a lifetime of experience. Gradually there emerges a delicate sensitivity to the inner motions of grace that are able to distinguish and be moved by the Spirit of God. This is a matter of harmony and disharmony, and intuitive sense.”
one. Or if the receiver of the gift is in a stage of self-hatred or depression, there can be an angry rejection of any offering. This requires of the giver the full range of skills within the contemplative stance. There is to be a loving awareness of the potential receiver’s suffering, a resisting of any tendency to judge, and a self-emptying of the need for personal affirmation. If a gift is rejected, the deliverer makes a quiet, gentle exit, silently blesses the person who is in distress, and then spends time in discernment until another recipient comes to mind. Naturally, some people are more able to do this than others. But the ministry, like discernment, is both a posture and a process, changing and enriching over time.

Though there is some direct instruction at the beginning of the day and also in the cards and newsletters as mentioned above, Mary’s Kitchen is teaching the contemplative stance experientially throughout the day by example and specific tasks. Despite its many challenges, Mary’s Kitchen is a marvelous ministry within which one can encourage the shifting consciousness Bruteau feels is so necessary for humanities survival. Over the four years of its existence, there has been a calming down, a gentling of energy when we gather, a more attentive attitude to both the work and the recipients. Bruteau points out that as individuals are made in the image of the divine, they too transcend definition and limitation, even as they express themselves in particularity. In the particularity of each gathering, one person, in a moment unexpected, will stand still in wonder, having broken through their limited mind to transcendence. It is not the kind of thing I can print in the newsletter. But these moments of illumination, are the hidden work of Mary’s Kitchen.

——

217 Bruteau, 254
The Elders’ Appreciation Lunch

In contrast to the meticulous organization that takes place before the gatherings of Mary’s Kitchen, the monthly elders’ lunches come about with a minimum of fuss, lending them a friendly, neighbourhood charm. Like a moveable feast rambling through the countryside, the lunches are hosted by whoever wishes to open their home for three hours over a Friday afternoon. The participants consist of a core group of elderly people in the community and those who are interested in spending time in their company. The elders range in age from sixty to ninety-six, and their supportive friends from age eighteen to sixty-five.\(^{218}\) The size of the group ebbs and flows as friends bring along friends to join in the merriment, though generally between ten and twenty people gather at any one lunch. The host home usually, though not always, provides some main item of food, and it is left to others to bring whatever they wish as a contribution. Some of the elders drive to the event while others are picked up and dropped off at their homes. There is no one person organizing or overseeing the gathering. Before the end of lunch the time and place for the next one is agreed upon, and everyone disperses. The information is passed along through visits, phone calls and emails in an informal manner throughout the rest of the month. The elder’s lunch has abandoned all hierarchical structure. Its organization is communal and functions well on this model.

What sets this informal lunch apart and makes it noteworthy is the group of women, including myself, who see these gatherings as an opportunity to cultivate compassion and

\(^{218}\) Note: The word ‘elder’ here refers simply to those older people in the community whom others value for their wisdom and fellowship. It does not refer to teaching elders in church leadership within the Reform tradition. See footnote 15, page 4 for further breakdown of this group in relation to church membership.
This is done in the simple manner of conversation. But it is conversation held in a contemplative stance—attentive to each person in the moment they are speaking and honouring of each life story as sacred text, as it is told both in words, and in the silence between those words. John O’Donohue, Celtic writer and poetic theologian, speaks of the essence of friendship with one’s Anam Cara, or soul friend. He writes, “One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences. Often secrets are not revealed in words, they lie concealed in the silence between the words or in the depth of what is unsayable between two people.” The elders’ lunch offers this kind of true friendship, allowing both the elders and those who love them, to explore each unfolding story in simple conversation around the lunch table.

Diane M. Millis, speaking of her journeying work with young people on campus, writes, “Each of us has a story to share. We don’t need to be eloquent or have a certain level of education in order to do so. What we do need is a process, a place, and a committed person, or group of persons to encourage and accompany us as we share our stories about our lives.” Though Millis is speaking of her experience with youth, her principles apply equally well to elders. As those who gather listen intently to each reminiscence, no matter how many times it is

---

219 This is Wendell Berry’s term for a group of people who surround and support your life in love. He feels these groups are a key element of sanity for humans. Also, it should be noted that of the other women who have taken this ministry to heart, one is an art therapist, one works in business teaching communal models to companies interested in working more collaboratively with their employees, and another is a massage therapist and cook who lives and works in an intentional community and has devoted her life to community building. They all have a deep love for elders, and a lively spiritual life.


221 Diane M. Millis, “Cultivating Compassion Through Group Spiritual Companioning,” Presence 18, no. 3 (September 2012): 6-13. In this essay concerning her initiative “Companions on a Journey,” Millis, who is trained as a spiritual director, writes: “I have grown to see that spiritual companioning is foundational to all that I do; it is a way of being present in conversation with others,” 13. Though I am the only one of the core group of women who is formally trained as a spiritual director, the other women have a particular affection and concern for the elders in our community, and a desire to sustain friendships with them by attentive conversation. In this way, though they might not word it in this language, they are doing the work of ‘spiritual companioning’. I have learned much from their constancy and patient attentiveness to the other.

222 Millis, 6.
told, the stories bring a richness of spirit to the flesh and blood people in our midst. Though illness and death are often part of the conversation, this deeper level of communication results in joyous celebrations.

One man never comes for lunch but he does not weep over the loss of his son some years ago. He witnessed his son’s death at close range, unable to prevent it. He retells the story each time we meet, though the tellings contain different elements with each recounting, enlarging perhaps his understanding of what actually happened, and in some small way, making the living with it more bearable. Afterwards, he takes out his accordion and serenades us. Another man cannot speak of his wife, for her very name causes his eyes to overflow and his voice to waver. He has no contact from his children, which is clearly painful to him, and of whom he seldom speaks. But he becomes animated when talking of his garden and in the summer months he shares the bounty of his produce with the group. The passion this man held for his wife flows into his garden. His beautiful, carefully tended vegetables seem like children of a sort that he brings to us for show and tell, and share. Over the five years of gathering, the lunch has become a safe place to speak of individual sorrows and also a place to let silence tell what words cannot. I believe, in the telling of their stories, the elders feel less isolated, more connected to the community outside their immediate families, and also, more connected to their internal wisdom and the sacredness their lives reflect. As Millis wisely notes, “Storytelling has the potential to enhance awareness of the Sacred, increase compassion for others, and build community. Through conversation about our journeys, we have the opportunity to more fully see both the commonality in the midst of our diversity and the distinctive features of our common experiences.”

---

223 Millis, 9.
The challenge at the elders’ lunch is to resist allowing the gathering to turn into a social event, abandoning the deeper work of concentrated listening in favour of mere frivolous chitchat. Staying in a place of discernment and attending to the spirit’s fluctuations and murmurings takes concentrated effort. I will often leave the table to serve, so as to remove myself for a few moments into a quieter space, if I feel my concentration is wavering. Or, if someone from the far end of the room tugs at my consciousness, I will quietly make my way towards them. From the outside, it cannot be observed that there is any method to my movements. But it is like dancing with an unseen partner, and in this way, if I am attentive, deep conversations are encouraged and sought out. This does not mean that the gatherings are not entertaining. On the contrary they are lively events full of laughter, and often song and dance, which is why one can easily be distracted by what twinkles on the surface. But when the thoughtful spiritual work is attended to, when awareness of the moment is practiced, there is an aftermath of contentedness that lingers, and though there may have been sorrowful exchanges during the lunch, there is at their conclusion the sense that we have all drawn closer to one another and the larger sacred spirit that gathers us in its embrace. Kathleen McAlpin, in her study *Ministry that Transforms*, comments, “it is not necessary to be transformed before we become contemplative or do justice. It is in the service of others that we become contemplative, and, even, Christian.”

Often, after the elders gather, I will write and reflect on some phrase in a conversation, or

---

224 Kathleen McAlpin, *Ministry That Transforms, A Contemplative Process of Theological Reflection* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009), 1. Kathleen McAlpin was an influential mentor during my studies at Regis while undertaking my D.S.D. Her wonderful little book reflects her commitment to the importance of theological reflection and contemplation.
the way a person tilted their head, or held their fork, or whispered in my ear. Through these simple written reflections I find myself drawn more closely to the group, and as always, drawn more closely to the gracious spirit of God. These theological reflections are further conversations in which I hope to discover more fully the lives of the elders, and also, the place that God plays both in my life, and theirs. McAlpin, who taught the importance of theological reflection as part of the contemplative way in the Diploma of Spiritual Direction training at Regis, assigned endless reflection papers in order that we might make the practice a regular part of our ministry as spiritual directors. She writes:

It my deep belief that this process of contemplative theological reflection on the human experience encountered in ministry can release the “spiritual energy” essential in today’s pluralistic and multi-faith society. This is an age of ever-changing pastoral and theological concerns, many of which are overwhelming in magnitude. As many Christians struggle today for identity and meaning, this theological reflection process can help them discover meaning in a culture gripped by meaningless.  

Perhaps the interest in the writings of farmer/philosopher Wendell Berry, poet Mary Oliver, humorist Annie Lennox, philosopher Annie Dillard, scientist David Suzuki and numerous others can be seen as an unknown seeking for theological reflections in everyday circumstances, allowing God to speak to people in language of their understanding, and releasing within them the much needed “‘spiritual energy’ essential in today’s pluralistic and multi-faith society.” Certainly, the elders’ lunches release spiritual energy into the community through their gentle conversation, their face-to-face contemplative encounters, and the reflections that take place afterwards, whether in a formal written way, or just in memory. The elders, having felt a connection to others through the lunches, will often then request a drive to a musical or art event in the community. Their spiritual longing for friendship and fellowship is ignited at the lunches,

---

and spreads to all manner of other gatherings throughout the rest of the month. At a recent
conzert at the Orangeville Opera House that my husband and I organized, the first twenty-five
tickets were quickly purchased by the elders who made an evening of it by organizing dinners
before hand and enticing family members to accompany them all decked out in their finest
clothes. Their energy was palpable as they enjoyed a night on the town, reminiscent, perhaps of
their younger days, and certainly a reflection of the spiritual energy they brought with them to
the theatre. Bruteau speaks of the Jesus Movement as a “multilevel, integrated, simultaneous,
sharing, and connection system rather than a linear sequence of control in one direction.”
This is most certainly the mode of operations with the Elders’ Appreciation Lunch.

**Boarding Homes Ministries**

In downtown Toronto in the basements of Parkdale boarding homes, holy communities of
authentic hope are emerging. Rev. Rodger Hunter has created intentional gatherings where
divine communion takes place in the most unexpected settings. Bread and juice and blessings are
dispensed along side profane language and the jazz like riffs of minds unhitched from the
moorings of societal norms. Here homelands emerge where “we claim our deepest reality of
oneness in the mystical and timeless unity known as the body of Christ.” If you are looking for
something spectacular to take place, and your eye is untutored in the way of seeing through the
lens of love, you will be disappointed. Nothing appears to happen in this ministry. Yet, here
contemplative stance is being practiced between unlikely groups of individuals where the
regarding of another takes on a calling to revere the moment, the face before you, and the spirit
both within you, within the other, and in the space between. What emerges are “beloved
communities” that reflect “a strange new homeland,” a “wonderfully disturbing landscape in

---

226 Bruteau, 113.
which love carries the day.”

Hunter founded Boarding Homes Ministry as an outreach program of the Presbyterian Church of Canada over sixteen years ago. I have been involved in this ministry for over eleven years. It is here I first encountered the kind of attentive listening and observing that I would later discover in the practice of spiritual direction. The decidedly Christian work involves pairing residents in privately owned boarding homes with a small group of members of a church who devote themselves to visiting their friends on a weekly or bi weekly basis. Hunter beautifully articulates the heart of the work in the homes.

Our ministry has the privilege of inviting members from churches to build relations with the people in a home. I think it (is) a gift, for in the sparse environment of a boarding home the interactions are small enough to hold the enormity of the Divine. Pared away from the world's distractions that community in Christ can listen to all the cross-chatter of extremes: affliction and blessing, the chilling realities of enforced material poverty and spiritual riches, the whisper of Divine love, and the hard slap of stigma. It is our privilege to invite church members to become part of such a glorious holy communion.

When visiting in the homes, it is imperative to resist the urge, either by verbal suggestion or physical activity, to ‘fix’ things. I have a memory of a group of church visitors spreading a sparkling linen tablecloth over a beaten up old table before placing a gold cross and some

228 Rodger Hunter, Developing Small Group Community Ministries (Toronto: Boarding Homes Ministries, 2005), Introduction.
229 For more detail on Rev. Hunter’s ministry see official website: http://boardinghomesministry.ca.
230 Jürgen Moltmann, who argued for church reform and a renewed understanding of a theology of the cross, suggested that renewal within the churches could be found in small innovative group ministry. Hunter has been much influenced my Moltmann’s assessment of the churches. The groups that Hunter forms are like small break away cells within the larger church. Regarding church reform, Moltmann writes, “By reform I mean the transformation of the church from a religious institution that looks after people into a congregational or community church in the midst of the people through the people and with the people. This means moving from an impenetrable, large-scale organization to an accessible small-scale community It is a path that can be followed only if we are prepared to break away from passive church membership to make a new beginning by entering into active participation in the life of the congregation. In our society, affiliations that are imposed are losing their power to shape people’s lives and lend them significance. Forms of community that are accepted personally and entered into voluntarily are becoming more important. This is especially true in the churches.” Jürgen Moltmann, “Preface to the Paperback Edition,” in The Church in the Power of the Spirit.
flowers on it, creating a kind of church like alter in the dim light of the crowded basement. On reflection with Hunter I came to see how this dismisses the actuality of where the residents live. Is Christ only to be present in tidy, clean places? How does it make the residents feel to have their space ‘spiffed up’ by visitors? The gentle coming along side the boarding home residents requires a deep respect for them as people and this extends to the physical dimensions of their living quarters. It requires laying aside any categorizing that might be a natural impulse. Current culture tosses psychological labeling around with regularity: alcoholic, mentally ill, compulsive/obsessive, a victim of abuse. As one spends time in the homes these very labels become abhorrent. Instead one comes to see the originality and beauty of each resident.

A contemplative stance allows for this deeper viewing of what may, at first look, be invisible. As Weil wrote, Jesus taught, and Hunter and those in his ministry know, “love sees the invisible.” Hunter speaks of the particular loving attention that is to be offered to each resident in terms of “the responsibility of looking rightly.” He writes:

Our gaze has power. Picking up on a theme of Rainer Maria Rilke, the eyes can ‘ripen’ those things that come towards them. (The Book of Hours 1, 1). Eyes alter life. A face might be chiselled from sharp glares; it can be scorched dry from hateful looks; a face might become buffed smooth from push offs. But eyes can also see with love, therefore, there is hope. The oil of loving eyes can anoint (as in oil poured on wounds; as oil in gentle caressing; as in oil in the Hebrew tradition poured on the head as symbol of God’s blessings and presence). And so we are invited in the responsibility of looking rightly.

In seeing one another in a loving way, our mutual connectedness becomes a tangible experience that alters both the viewer and the viewed. It is a particularly profound insight in the

---

232 Weil, *Waiting for God*, 91. The full quote from Weil is: "He who has absolutely no belongings of any kind around which social consideration crystalizes does not exist. A popular Spanish song says in words of marvelous truth: 'If anyone wants to make himself invisible, there is no surer way than to become poor.' Love sees what is invisible."

233 Rev. Rodger Hunter, taken from his introduction to the lyrics for “Creative Eyes” in the liner notes from Boarding Homes Ministries production, “Cat Jeoffry Songs and Hymns,” a collection of songs and hymns which are part of the Cat Jeoffry Church School Curriculum “designed to heighten the Church relations with the gifted and beautiful people in the mental health community who have so much to teach us.” www.boardinghomesministries.ca.
boarding homes as the gulf between resident and visitor can often seem insurmountable. From this place of communal understanding, the discernment that emerges—when to speak, who to speak to, what trail of conversation to follow—takes on a fresh adventure that would not be possible were the visitors trapped within confined categories that leave little space for imaginative thought. The responsibility of looking rightly does indeed smooth walkways through dark valleys, illuminating not only murky basements, but the possibility of relationships far beyond our usual tribes.

Here is both the mystery and the majesty of working with Hunter in dimly lit rooms: unexpected illumination descends when least expected. John sits rocking back and forth in a torn corduroy coat he wears through the steamy heat of summer, and from nowhere, your heart lurches, and you fall in love. One heart speaks to another, and yet nothing changes in the room. When we gather with Rodger for conversation away from the homes, reflecting and sharing our experiences, we find this a common experience, this ‘falling in love’. It does not bear any resemblance to the Valentine’s card variety of romance. It is a profound, wretched, sacred experience of knowing the suffering of the other, and loving deeply. Quiet, contemplative thought is the lover’s gift. Bruteau would say this is the beginning of all deep change, this slight shift in atmosphere, this illumination of a love that the moment before did not exist, and has no apparent reason in the common sense world. Bruteau, who favours a metaphor of dance in attempting to describe the dynamic creativity that works beyond our rational minds to weave us all together into a new consciousness, would say, we have entered the sacred dance. Hunter’s work provides a vast ballroom of unlikely guests. The sacred spirit, always in attendance, provides the music.

234 Bruteau, 257.
Contemplative Retreats

In the last year I have begun to offer contemplative retreats at my home in the country in response to the request of individuals and groups who are interested in learning about contemplative stance. Our home and gardens are particularly well suited to this endeavor, being located at the end of a dirt road in a remote part of the Mulmur Hills, two hours north of Toronto. Walking trails, including the well-known Bruce Trail, meander through eighty acres. The extensive ornamental vegetable garden provides fresh food for the participants, as well as much beauty. There are places throughout the house and on the grounds to sit, nap, rest, ponder, and contemplate.

When the participants arrive, all appears serene and calm, but much work has gone into the process of severing the house and property from visitors and interruptions.

All who come to the retreats are respectful of the boundaries and instructions that are set forth prior to the day-long intensive. Participants are instructed to come without technology or distractions and to begin their retreat the evening before while still at home. Instructions sent out by email in advance of the retreat give clear instructions as to expectations. So far the retreats

235 Margaret Self, Going on Retreat, A Beginner’s Guide to the Christian Retreat Experience (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002). Self’s practical little book drew my attention to the experience of the retreat participants as I was beginning to organize the overall focus of the day apart.

236 Patricia Blakely, “Welcoming the Stranger: Preparing for Spiritual Direction in Your Home,” Presence 15, no. 4 (December 2009): 28-31. “Everything you do to prepare for a session, both your outer and your inner preparations, can have the quality of deep hospitality, a hospitality that tend to both the outer and the inner needs of your “guests.” Though Blakely is referring to the preparation a spiritual director makes to receive a directee, her instructions are transferable to the preparation made for the retreatants.

237 This is included in the notes sent to participants in advance of arrival. “You will see from the brief overview of our day, that twelve hours has been set aside for you in my home and on the surrounding property. But the retreat actually begins the evening before, on your own time. Try to lay aside Thursday evening as best you can to take care of any details that will distract from your day of contemplation and rest. Come as lightly as you can, attending to any of your particular needs so as to avoid fretting once you are here. Except for emergency contact, please allow your day to be disconnected from the technology that ties us to the outside world. As much as possible, spend your time of preparation in quietness. Pack comfortable clothes. Weather in the country can be changeable—and the cold weather approaches. The Bruce Trail crosses our property, so bring appropriate footwear if you like to hike. You may consider bringing a journal or notebook. But leave behind all reading books, cell phones, lists and agendas of all kinds. This is a day for your own pleasure—a day to wonder and wander, to absorb new thought and to find yourself refreshed by the simple act of being. Bring your open heart. Your precious self is what is most needed.”
have consisted of people who are well established in their careers in the city but are searching, as many people are, for a deeper spiritual understanding of their lives. Many have established spiritual practices of their own. Some take part in aspects of formal religion, but most do not.

Though the reasons the participants take part in the retreat may vary, the purpose in my offering them is not. I teach the practical steps in contemplative stance in the hope that these learnings will be incorporated into my guests’ personal and professional lives. I believe these teachings to be crucial if we are to move forward to the communion paradigm so necessary for human survival. The retreat teaches by specific instruction, interactive conversation, individual spiritual direction and contemplative experience. As the mail out to the participants makes clear, though it may be a retreat, it is not a day of repose, but rather a day of concentrated effort, even if that effort involves deliberate periods of rest.\textsuperscript{238}

Two personal guides and one process have shaped the form and presentation of these retreats: Evelyn Underhill, Emmanuel Levinas, and The Contemplative Peer Group Supervision Model. Underhill, the twentieth century Anglican spiritual writer and lecturer, spent the later years of her life in perhaps her most distinguished work, that of retreat leader. It was her firm belief that “the spiritual life, is not a peculiar or extreme form of piety. It is, on the contrary that full and real life for which man is made; a life that is organic and social, essentially free, yet with

\textsuperscript{238} Participants receive this piece of writing in their pre retreat notes. “In a world embattled by violence in all forms and pressed to move at lightening speed to feed the mechanisms of avarice that are driving life forward, a focus on the art and discipline of contemplation is a revolutionary act. It works alongside our daily routines of work and worry and though it is particularly crucial in times of stress, violence and despair, it is also the midwife of deep joyfulness and contentment. Thomas Merton, who was a contemplative of particular artistry, called this intentional way of being “the highest expression of intellectual and spiritual life... life itself, fully awake, fully aware that it is alive...a spiritual wonder.”

We need to develop both the art and discipline of contemplation not as a place of escape, but as a method of providing a grounded place to begin all dialogues with the intention of peace and resolution. And then, we may hope, as voices of wise council, to be welcome guests at the table of all negotiations whether they be family disputes, scientific think tanks, or international political and economic assemblies. It is my hope and prayer, that our day together will instil within each of you a way of regarding yourselves, and the world, that is attentive to the creative spirit. And too, that the day will be refreshing and joyful, a respite in your busy lives, a time for reflection and gentleness of spirit. May grace abide.”
its own necessities and laws.”

Sitting in an intimate circle leading small groups from the notebooks on her lap, Underhill taught by direct conversation, her own quiet comportment, and the careful attention she gave to the details of the retreat location and the pacing of the day. Her purpose in the retreats was to “present some of the great truths concerning man’s spiritual life in simple language” and to impart her deep belief that spirituality was “not an intense form of other worldliness remote from the common ways and incompatible with the common life but of vital concern to ordinary people.”

I have copied Underhill’s format for teaching and her attention to the personal comforts of those in her care. In her notebooks she explains how she orders the day, with periods of teaching, rest, and short one-on-one spiritual direction sessions with each participant. I have included all these elements in the contemplative retreats.

Emmanuel Levinas, the French scholar and Talmudic philosopher who developed his ‘theology of face’ in his seminal work *Totality and Infinity*, challenges me with his thought that “love is the incessant watching over the other.” Asking the question, “Is there a way for the wisdom of heaven to return to earth?” his answer is yes, and it is in the face of the other, for, Levinas claims, “The Other must be closer to God than I.”

When gathering information from the retreat participants I request only contact information, with no personal details unless they

---

239 Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life* (Great Britain: Nodder and Stoughton, 1937), 47. This little, but powerful book was first broadcast as a series of four lectures on the BBC in 1936 and comes directly out of Underhill’s retreat notebooks. See also, Evelyn Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1923); Evelyn Underhill, *Light of Christ* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1944). These books contain the teachings in her retreats, though perhaps her most famous book is *Mysticism, A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1912) By great good fortune, after Underhill’s death her personal notebooks were kept and have been published in various forms. See Dana Green, ed. *Evelyn Underhill, Fragments from an Inner Life* (Harrisburg, P.A.: Morehouse Publishing, 1993).


241 Underhill, ix.

concern food allergies or physical limitations. I do not want their professions, accomplishments, current challenges or sorrows to interfere in my meeting with them ‘face to face’. This allows what Levinas would call ‘the naked gaze’. I take in their presence with as little worldly interference as possible. Having written their names on a board near my desk, and kept them in my mind by name only, my initial gift when they arrive is to receive them in the freshness of first sight. There is an astonishing beauty in this manner of greeting. Like all things born of God, it is not without its own magic. Throughout the day, in all interactions, I try to keep my gaze free of extraneous distractions and focused on seeing through the eyes of love.

The Contemplative Peer Group Supervision Model is an excellent tool for spiritual directors as they gather to support one another in their ongoing practice.\(^{243}\) Through a highly structured, timed process combining sharing, reading, reflection, prayer and silence, peers are able to offer each other thoughtful feedback on the sessions they are undertaking. Participating in this process during my training at Regis College taught me the importance of a strong framework when inviting the spirit into a particular time and place. With twelve people arriving for a full twelve hours for the retreats, a solid framework is imperative. Following the supervision model, the day is divided into specific blocks that are carefully timed and predetermined. Breakfast at the beginning of the day is open and conversational. The main part of the day, held in silence but for the teaching and some time for questions, is divided into periods of instruction interspersed

with rest. Short one-on-one spiritual direction segments for each participant are clearly delineated. The celebratory dinner at days end is always mystically joyous. As the retreats are held on a Friday, and the dinner begins at dusk with the lighting of candles, they are, as Abraham Heschel would say of the Sabbath, “a spiritual wonderland of time.” I believe this is in large part due to the careful schedule of the day, with its times of enforced silence and careful pacing.

At each retreat I remark on the shift in energy within the format. People arrive with lots of chatter, but are actually, quite exhausted. In the question period after the first teaching session, their attention rests on inconsequential matters. As the day progresses, there is a deepening to the inquiries. In the spiritual direction slot each participant seems to hone in on a single matter of concern in his or her life—a depressed teenage child, an elderly demanding parent, an irritating colleague at work. And without being prompted, they take one of the disciplines we have spoken of in the day, and apply it to their situation. I see this as enormously hopeful.

In spiritual direction, the first and foremost requirement is a place of safety and compassion for the directee in order that they may explore their own humanity, and the spiritual journey that defines their life. Each of these situations provides, in its own manner, this place of comfort and consistency. In each gathering there are leaders and/or participants who are

---

244 Directions sent to the participants ahead of time, prepare them for this practice. The notes read, “Between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. we will be observing ‘noble silence.’ This is a restful gift, allowing you to turn inward and more fully absorb what is being taught. I will be speaking, of course, and you may ask me questions directly, but there is no cross conversation among yourselves during this time. If you have not practiced this discipline before, you may find it challenging in the beginning. We are social creatures and the need for communication is natural. But you will come to see the restorative value of compassionate silence.” Interestingly, everyone warmed to this practice and all saw it as one of the gifts of the day.

245 Heschel, The Sabbath, 18.

246 McDonnell, “A Contemplative Spirituality to Guide the Supervisory Process,” 42-54. In many ways my approach to the retreats mirrors the contemplative spirituality McDonnell suggests as a model for the supervisory process. The elements of compassion, discernment, hospitality and the important reliance upon the “compassionate presence of the Holy One,” nurture the developing spiritual awareness of the participants in much the same way they would foster the formation of spiritual directors.
intentionally devoted to the service of others and open to the movement of the spirit. And in all situations there is a deep respect for the gifts of the sacred in each individual and for the mystery many call God. Though there can be disruptions at any time, the ever present divine spirit provides a healing balm. Those who are holding a contemplative stance for others are able to offer enough grounding that uncomfortable emotions may be brought forth. The tender, yet fluid nature of these gatherings models how contemplative stance may be used to uplift and comfort others at the same time it models the new paradigm of communion which is unfolding.

All four of these opportunities to practice contemplative stance have confirmed its practical use in everyday situations and the need to give people tools with which to negotiate the necessary shift in consciousness to which Bruteau and others insist humanity must move. This tending the holy in community settings leaves everyone’s consciousness enlarged\textsuperscript{247} If there is a way forward for humanity, it may well lie in the tender attention to the other in an atmosphere of spiritual hospitality. It is here in these seemingly inconsequential, random gatherings where infinitesimal changes may lead to an understanding of the connectedness Bruteau insists is the base for the larger shifts needed in the social/political field. As Jesus spoke and taught in small groups around the dining table, so too here, small changes begin, that may yet lead to the place where we are able to fully participate in the co-creating process to which Bruteau would call us. We are, Bruteau insists, “God’s expanding outreach surface, God’s fingertips, where the action is, where the excitement and the beauty are expected to be, in human consciousness and social relations.”\textsuperscript{248} If humanity is to actively engage in this emerging evolutionary shift, the place to begin is in particularities of our individual lives, as we quietly, yet determinedly, practice the art and skill of contemplative stance.

\textsuperscript{248} Bruteau, 248.
CONCLUSION

In every age there are pressing needs. And the pressing need in this age is wakefulness. There is a need to be awake, to be present, to be able to look with eyes wide open and not flinch at the maelstrom that is swirling around humanity. Dark days are coming. They can no more be avoided than could the black plague of the 13th century be stopped once it had locked its talons into human flesh. In these early days of the twenty-first century, a fog of soul sickness lies across the land. Humanity stumbles, confused and uncertain of the way forward. As it becomes increasingly evident that humans are destroying the very elements that sustain life, it is also increasingly evident that we lack the will to make the changes necessary for survival.

Ricocheting between pride and slothfulness, entrapped by both the promise and limitations of technology and science, even the best of intentions seem fraught with uncertainty.

And yet here, in this place of unknowing, may lie hope, for doubtfulness and darkness are often the places of rebirth if we can be patient and wakeful attendants. Christians, in particular, who are called to remain faithful at the foot of a bloody cross know that hope when it is authentic arises out of the crucible of hopelessness. For true hope, is a hope of which we know nothing. It requires waiting on the unknown in a posture of active faith, certain of divine illumination, but uncertain as to the nature of its actuality. Pam McCarroll in her poetic thesis on the nature of Christian hope, *Hope in Waiting*, tells us that real hope is “hope that is given unexpectedly as the intrusion of grace…a hope that speaks in and to the real anxieties of this age, shedding off the...”

249 “The price for this new insight and compassionate love . . . seems to be darkness, suffering, and even death. Our gods have to die before we reach for the God who is beyond all our human images and projections and who waits over the brink of the known in the darkness. The signs of new life appearing among us are somehow the other side of an emptiness that paradoxically is not only bringing us closer to God but also purifying our desire and imagination and moving them toward transcendence of what has been.” Constance Fitzgerald, ‘The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplation,” in *Heavy Blessings, Light Burdens*, 218.


illusions of optimism and walking into the heart of our darkness to await the coming of impossible possibilities.\textsuperscript{252} All four gatherings as described in chapter three offer this kind of authentic hope. This hope is the cradle of contemplative stance. And from it all manner of impossible possibilities may be born. Here briefly, are some imaginings for public schools and places of worship.

Education systems from preschool up to high school might well begin their day with the simple teachings of attentiveness, resistance, self-emptying and discernment followed by a short period of practice in contemplation. Spiritual literacy would be a regular part of school curriculum, exploring life-affirming aspects of various religions, philosophies, wisdom traditions, or art forms.\textsuperscript{253} Each class could begin with five minutes of quiet attentiveness, mindfulness, or meditation.\textsuperscript{254} Half-day retreats for times of quiet reflection would be a regular part of a full education. Particular regard would be given to excursions to the countryside. The more urban the setting of the school, the more frequent the journeys.\textsuperscript{255} The quiet offering of service in the community where small needs could be met—a lunch delivered to an elderly person, a story read to a child, a letter delivered to one living alone—would also be part of the education of giving small graces with no fanfare or accolades. At the university level, contemplative practices would be an integrated part of all education, particularly in the


\textsuperscript{253} In North America perhaps the most influential leader in this field is Parker Palmer. See: Parker Palmer, \textit{The Courage to Teach} (San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass, (2007). Further resources can be found at the website for his Centre for the Courage and Renewal. http://www.couragerenewal.org (Accessed September 2012).

\textsuperscript{254} In the field of education, contemplation and mindfulness are cutting edge explorations. See: The Association for Mindfulness in Education. “AME is a collaborative association of organizations and individuals working together to provide support for the growing interest in including mindfulness training as a component of K-12 education. We are committed to furthering training and research in this field.” http://mindfuleducation.org. See also, Tobin Hart, Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom, http://mindfuleducation.org/Hart_Opening_Contemplative_Mind.pdf. (Accessed on April 27, 2013).

professional fields. At all levels of education, the *Examen of Consciousness* would be taught and encouraged, the sharing of the divine movements part of everyday conversation.

Religious congregations of all kinds might well begin by desiring to explore the mystical tradition in their own faith history. From here all endeavors would flow. This could begin by opening the doors of all associated buildings and offering true spiritual hospitality to everyone in the surrounding community. This hospitality, birthed in co-creation with the divine spirit would be unique to each church, but a place to begin might be the offering of quiet gardens open to everyone. The planting of herbs and flowers would offer the refreshment of beauty. Passers by would be encouraged to pick bouquets, or fruit from fruit trees. Benches and chairs might be tucked into nooks and crannies, swings in trees for playing, and hammocks in the summer for the weary. In the summer, cold, fresh drinks could be available at all times, and in the winter hot

---


257 Matthew Fox writing passionately about the challenges of today’s context sees the importance of mystical literacy. “Is it not time for our religions to get back to essentials—which is meant to be the teaching of spirituality—and to contribute wisdom to an increasingly despairing world? This is not the time for denominational one-upmanship. It is a time to cull wisdom from any and all of its sources and to let folly go . . . If we are to make our faiths live again—not for their own sakes but for the survival of our species—then we had better become mystically literate again.” Mystical literacy depends on mystical experience.” Matthew Fox, *One River, Many Wells, Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Butnam, 200), 8.

258 As Christians we are required to welcome the stranger in our midst, to recognize that we too are strangers in a strange land, our homeland being with God. (Eph.2:19) True hospitality is the offering of safety, welcome, fellowship, humanity, compassion, rest, comfort. And it is offered in particular to the afflicted, the poor, the unloved, the left out, the troubled, the destitute. True Christian hospitality has very little to do with napkin rings and silverware. It is in fact a revolutionary concept, a move away from ourselves and out towards others, attending the needs and concerns of those around us. There is nothing to be gained socially in this kind of hospitality, and in fact, much to be lost, for it can and is draining, inconvenient, disruptive, and dangerous. As practiced by the early Christians, hospitality was “potentially subversive and countercultural.” Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 15. See also, Michel Hershberger, *Hospitality, Expecting Surprises* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999); Leslie A. Hay, *Hospitality: The Heart of Spiritual Direction* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 2006).

259 The quiet garden movement, which began in Britain, encourages churches, among other venues to “offer within their premises an area of beauty and peacefulness dedicated to quiet prayer and solitude.” As the world increases in noise and confusion, any church offering quiet, safe space will be offering needed gifts to their community. http://www.quietgarden.org. (accessed January 15, 2013).
beverages. A library rich in devotionals could offer spiritual teachings to read or borrow. How wonderful if each person who frequented the church volunteered as spiritual host for a period of time in the month and trained in the disciplines of contemplative stance. Then there would always be a compassionate ear for those wishing to seek the consoling presence of another human guided by the divine spirit. In all decision making matters the leadership in the church might practice the simple art of waiting for intuitive leading.\textsuperscript{260} Yearly spiritual retreats and periods of contemplation and rest would be booked into the working calendar. Speaking as part of the Christian faith, it is my deeply held belief that God does not need to be named to be present and that Jesus does not need to be evoked but peers back at us in all faces. What manner of wonderments might pour forth from a church that drew its very breath from God, and both wore and greeted the Holy One in the face of the other.

“When that period was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven and my power of knowledge returned to me.”\textsuperscript{261} These are the words of a king who, once rich and powerful had forgotten from whence all his wealth came. But after a time of desolation and alienation, he turned back to God and remembered his deep connection with all that was sacred. He remembered the source of his wholeness, and in this, he was reborn. As Bruteau and Merton and Berry and Teiliard de Chardin and others attest, the human race stands in a place of desolation and alienation, from divinity, from the earth, from its own humanity. We are at a cross roads in our destiny. We are in the midst of a spiritual crisis. Though as Bruteau proposes, and others observe, there are those who are beginning to develop an understanding of humanity as bound

\textsuperscript{260} Gerald May towards the end of his book on spirituality and mental health, suggests that the simple act of waiting brings sanity and clarity both to lives and communities. He writes, “Practice the deep, quiet art of waiting, in making decisions, if a direction seems right, follow it. But if nothing seems right, wait. Wait for rightness. If there is not time to wait, move ahead to do whatever is the best you can do. Then wait. And in living, do not rush your sanity. Do the best you can. Then wait.” \textit{Simple Sane, The Spirituality of Mental Health}, 114.

\textsuperscript{261} Dan 4:31.
together in a sacred sphere. Our hope lies in lifting our eyes towards the heavens and allowing grace to descend, to be reborn in humility and courage, and in our rebirthing, once again know the holiness of the earth on which we stand, and open our arms in welcoming embrace. From this place, we may yet be worthy co-creators of all that is to pass. Bruteau offers this final encouragement:

You are children of God. You have an umbilical connection to the Divine Life, to an inexhaustible source of existence, goodness, novelty, and beauty. Draw on it. Nurse on it. . . You are capable, not helpless. The divine intelligence and energy are in you. Don’t be afraid. You are very valuable to God (Matt. 10:31) You can do what needs to be done. Don’t wait for something magical and supernatural to transform the world. All of us together are the Messiah. We have to do it together, and it has to come from the inside out.  

May we be granted the courage and tenacity to be worthy co-creators.

---

262 Bruteau, 263, 264.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


_____. *Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Your Life to the Awareness of God*. San Francisco:


