

ANSD



Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc

For people engaged in Godly Listening . . .

For once, Tasmania has not been the only snowbound state in Australia! With snow falling at sea level it was a winter wonderland at my place last week. On the spur of the moment, my friend and I headed inland (only a 20min drive) to walk to Kimberly's Lookout at Nook. It was breathtakingly beautiful. We had smiles on our faces for days afterward, and we weren't the only ones. This rare fall of snow seemed to bring out the child in everyone. Wonder, joy and delight were beaming from faces all over the town. A week on from our special "snow day" it seems much of that good cheer has melted with the snow.



May God open your eyes to see wonders all around you, and may you hold them deep in your spirit.

Denise Stephenson (Editor) *photo: by Heather Reid, Kimberley's Lookout (Tas)*

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Items for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to the Editor at the above address (email is preferred).

Your contributions are very welcome.

Next Edition
Aug / Sept / Oct
(Sydney / Tasmania)

Copy Deadline:
18th October 2015

A.N.S.D. Inc Annual General Meeting 2015

6th September 2015
To be held at Nunyara Conference Centre
5 Burnell Drive Belair SA 5052

AGM AGENDA

Ordinary business:

- Welcome
- Present
- Apologies
- Minutes of last AGM
- Executive Report (President's Report)
- Financial Report
- Election of:
 - President
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Regional Representatives (at least 5)
 - Membership Committee (3 members
not on Executive)

Nominations will be accepted from the floor of the meeting, but prior consent to nomination must have been obtained from anyone nominated but not present at the AGM.

Specific business if any:

- Brief Regional Reports
- ANSD Conference 2016

2015 Gathering for the Australian Ecumenical Spiritual Direction Community

Landscapes of Encounter



The unfolding of the morning by Tess Milne 2015

Keynote Speaker: Dr Denis Edwards

Art: Dr Kateri Duke rsj

Poetry: Dr Marlene Marburg

*4th to 6th September 2015
Friday dinner to Sunday lunch*

*Nunyara Conference Centre,
5 Burnell Drive Belair SA 5052*

**A Gathering of the Australian Ecumenical
Spiritual Direction Community**

Sponsored by the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction

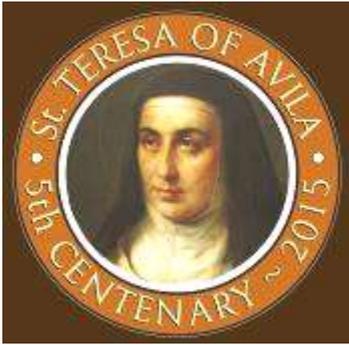
A.N.S.D. Inc 2016 Conference

Details of the 2016 conference to be held in Western Australia are now available on the website so you can begin planning for next year.

ANSD
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For people engaged in Godly Listening . . .

**CONFERENCE
2016
PERTH
MAY 13-15**

***Renewing the Great
Conversation:
Spiritual Direction
and the Natural World***



With the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the birth of Teresa of Avila I would like to offer some thoughts about the most significant time of transition in her life's journey and suggest some guidance that she offers for us personally and in our practice of spiritual direction.

Who was Teresa?

Teresa was born into a prosperous family which was seeking acceptance and respectability in the 16th century golden age of the Spanish empire. She took on the family's desire to do well which she showed throughout her life. She was gifted with a lively affective nature shown in her many friendships which she recalled in her writings and especially in her deep love for her father which affected the

course of her life. Teresa's family wanted to show its credentials as strong in the Catholic faith. Her father's family were known as 'conversos' in that their origins were in the Jewish faith and 'conversos' at that time were emerging from being suspect in their faith by Spain's nobility. Teresa then grew up in an environment where her piety and sense of faith developed from an early age so it is not surprising that she joined the Carmelite community of The Incarnation as a young woman. Some writers have suggested that she joined the community because she was not attracted to married life having witnessed her own mother's demanding and unattractive life of child bearing. Relatively well off women were able to join such communities as the Incarnation, maintain their social life and live a satisfactory life.

It is useful to note that the lifestyle of the Carmelite community at the Incarnation was a medieval one, meaning that its spirituality was centred on the regular following of liturgical life, prayer flowing from this regime and community life open to those who might seek guidance there. There was not yet the emphasis on guidance in forms of private prayer and what we might call some form of spiritual direction. Such a change was being encouraged with the development of humanism and the perceived importance of the individual. In particular Spain in its golden age was giving rise to its own diverse spiritualities with a number of writers such as John of Avila and Peter of Alcantara promoting the way to find God. Such movements were appearing at the same time that those driving the Inquisition were suspicious of ways which deviated in any way from their orthodoxy. A strong colour seen throughout the writing of Teresa's Life was her attempt to show her orthodoxy.

Only three years after joining the Carmelite community Teresa began to feel some dissatisfaction with her life. This manifested itself in recurrence of illness and disastrous medical treatment which meant that she spent time away from her community to try to recuperate. As often happens hard times in life bear their own graces. She went to stay with her uncle and while there discovered the writings of the Franciscan Frae Osuna, in particular *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*. The core of this book was a call to practice what was called the prayer of recollection, a way to find the God within. There was a call to just be in the presence of God and this exposed Teresa to be open to the direct invitation to be familiar with God. Teresa continued to be encouraged by the wisdom of this book over the next 20 years of her life.

On a plateau

For the period of 1538 until 1565 Teresa lived in what she perceived as an in between time. In writing her Life she speaks of living a burdensome life, "because in prayer I understood more clearly my faults. On the one hand God was calling me; on the other hand I was following the world. All the things of God made me happy; those of the world held me bound. It seems I desired to harmonize these two contraries- so inimical to each other- such as the spiritual life and sensory joys pleasures and pastimes." (Life 7:17). Teresa struggled because of her gifts. She was a lively outgoing person who thrived on relationships. But this lively outgoing nature coloured not only her human relationships but the profound relationship with God that had developed in the rich home life of Avila and had called her to life in Carmel. Teresa never doubted her call to religious life, her problem was in her trying to control or manage her life which would not submit to her management.

Teresa saw her life as burdensome because she was trying to hold a middle road to control from the place of the ego the pull of God and the attraction and demands of others and life in general. She sought to have an EFFECTIVE detachment from others, one which she could control and then she could live her life in peace. She came to realize after the long struggle of 18 years that what was needed to live at peace was AFFECTIVE detachment. This was not a denial of herself or the giftedness of relationships with others and her world. What was called for was that she be IN TOUCH WITH HERSELF and this came to her the more she allowed herself to become IN TOUCH WITH GOD.

How then did Teresa see herself as living through this time of ambivalence? Her Life was written in 1565 when looking back on this plateau time. It was also written with the psychological understanding of the time. When she speaks in Life ch. 12, "I did not put all my trust in His Majesty and lose complete trust in myself" she is not addressing the need for a mature sense of oneself which is necessary for progress in the spiritual life. In this regard however Teresa shows in her Life that she was what we can call a self discovery person. She was aware of who she was and one of the challenges of 'staying' with her when reading the Life is that she is forever reporting her experiences whether human or divine rather than laying out some clear map of her progress. We are told to begin to understand Teresa we need to immerse ourselves in her writings.

From the Life we can say:

- Teresa knew and trusted her experience as the place where she noticed the movement of God
- Teresa lived that experience within a lively mutual relationship with Jesus Christ. This she insisted on especially as she described the mystical experiences which coloured her journey.
- Teresa was aware that people wanted to understand progress in the spiritual life. She described it as best she could but was convinced that it was always a journey of giving oneself over to the giver of life.
- Teresa was attracted by Osuna's prayer of recollection because such a practice brought her face to face with God at the centre. She also recommended that when prayer is difficult, we have a helpful book at hand which might just evoke some sense of God and lead us to stay in that presence.
- Teresa was attracted to significant women of the gospel such as Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman at the well. Such people spoke to her affective nature. She was able to be there in the story. She was as they were, affirmed in her sense of the great love that Jesus had for her as a woman and a woman who had given her life to him in such a dedicated way.
- Teresa was also taken with stories such as that of the conversion of Saint Augustine. Again the telling of his experience of conversion resonated with the experiences she felt.

Some insights from The Interior Castle

The Interior Castle is seen as Teresa's masterpiece that lays out her best understanding of progress in the spiritual life. The focus here will be on the transition from the 3rd to the 4th mansion which best captures the time of plateau described so far.

We recognize that in relation to significant change in our life we can be in three places:

- We can be peacefully living from our place of grace and this is being affirmed by a sense of peace, love of friends and service of others.
- We can be experiencing the blessing of being in a new place. We now see life differently. We have new energy for things which do not come from us making ourselves do these things. We have a new sense of the graciousness of life. We feel that God has more sway in our life.
- The most challenging place is when we are in between. When the former place of grace has dried up and despite determined efforts on our part we cannot find the peace we used to have. We often are tempted to feel that we are in this place because we have been lax and inattentive to our duties. But there is something there that tells us that despite our sincere efforts, the old is not working. We also occasionally get a glimpse of something better, another way of living but it is fleeting and most of the time we live with discontent but also an inability to move on to another place. As we stew around we actually come to know aspects of ourselves which because they seem disparate or opposites draw us in many directions. We may swing from wanting to take up some project to just wanting to be by ourselves. We are drawn to relate in new ways and then we want things to be the way they were.

Teresa came to have some sense of these different experiences on her journey towards the centre of the castle. The twenty years of plateau were for her a time when she was being invited to let go the self control of the 'good Christian' of the third mansion and enter the dwelling place where the movement came more from the unmerited clasp of God.

The third dwelling place is often seen as the place of the model adult Christian. One has a serious committed prayer life and this bears fruit in a commitment to Christian life. But the problem with living in this mansion is the success it brings. People living in this place understandably think they have a grasp on the spiritual life and cannot understand how their prayer can become dry and unsatisfying and how their faith practice does not protect them from the fears and uncertainties that life brings. They begin to experience a loss of control in their lives. A useful check for people here can be their response to unexpected setbacks in life. If their felt sense is that 'this should not happen, that God owes them' then it is a sign that they do not yet understand that God's gifts that they have experienced are not the main deal but encouragement to move on. While movement towards God can be more obvious in the earlier mansions the more subtle invitation to move from the third mansion can take as we see in Teresa's case, a long time.

When one enters the fourth mansion you experience in some way being contemplative where God's activity in our prayer is significantly dominant. While contemporary spiritual writing invites us all to adopt a contemplative attitude in our life and prayer, Teresa here in writing about the 4th mansion speaks of the change of the centre of energy.

Teresa describes the different experiences of people in the third and fourth mansions to underline the change. She says that people in the third mansion can have spiritual experiences at times of prayer but these are euphoric and felt to be passing. She calls these consolations or 'contentos', satisfying for the person and can be gifts of encouragement from God to come closer. Consolations are tied more closely with our personality and personal history and can be tiring as well as satisfying.

She speaks of experiences in the fourth mansions as spiritual delights or 'gustos', much more powerful and clearly coming from the God within. They are felt as a wounding by the beloved. The person is at once aware that God has acted but feels out of control. They cannot grasp in a way that perhaps they could before how God who is now acting. But they know that God has taken hold of them somehow and they have been strengthened to live more as God wants them to. They do experience in this mansion interior recollection and their prayer is called the prayer of quiet. The experiences in this mansion can be quite disturbing. Because we cannot apply the ways of thinking that helped us progress earlier, they along with our imagination seem to run riot at times and we can become discouraged at our prayer. But because we know deep down that God is taking hold of us Teresa encourages us to try to find ways of being as quiet as we can in prayer and just being faithful in being with God.

Our transition Times

What are some guidelines we can draw from our journey with Teresa?

- Any movement towards a relationship of friendship with God begins with God's invitation so our prayer and recollection needs to be of the kind that helps us notice God's invitation. That is why gratefulness for life, for the ordinary things of life is an important way to begin all prayer.
- Teresa tells us of the wonderful gift of intimate friendship with God that can be ours. No matter where we are on the spiritual journey, if our sense of God is of a God who is punitive, guilt causing, or one who will only give if we pay our dues, we need to know that our God is not the Christian God. There is something in us maybe in our experience which we are confusing with God.
- Teresa shows us that responding to God's invitation to change, living in the in between place mentioned before, can be a long and challenging time but the more we come to know ourselves and the kind of God who calls us, we shall be able to stay with the challenge of the journey.
- Notice the experiences which give us a sense of God's touch. The ways this can happen are many. But whatever they are, notice your response. Do you want more?

Teresa's Conversion—continued

- If you are satisfied that your sense of displacement comes because change is happening in your life and not because you are not attentive to your commitments then do not try to force yourself to go back to where things used to be good and you knew peace.
- Through your own reflection and maybe with the help of talking to a trusted person, get to know and accept your own place of weakness. We speak of a compassionate owning of yourself.
- We come to know then a compassionate, merciful God who surprises us in and through the events of our life. This will not take away the misery like the dentist takes away the toothache. But somehow we shall be able to stay with the difficult time. People often find they are helped by supportive groups of people who may have some sense of what the spiritual journey entails.

We may be helped by Rowan Williams's final words in his commentary on the *Interior Castle*.

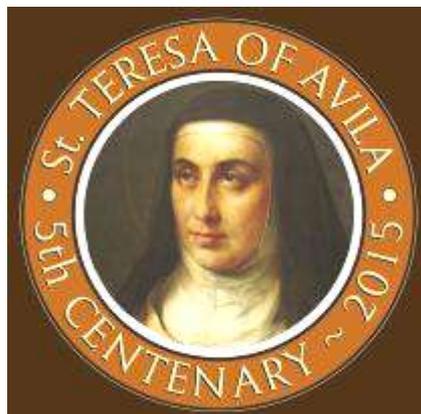
“Her personal journey, her deepening awareness of the perils of false interiority, above all the growing comprehensiveness, nuance and resourcefulness of her vision of the incarnate Christ enable her to draw together themes from the whole of her work in something like a synthesis. The movement is ultimately one of ‘homecoming’, coming to oneself. If God is at the centre we can only live and act from the centre of our reality (and so live and act with integrity) when we let that central action of God that holds us in being, have free play with us. ‘if only when God has been able to love us in fullness that we are wholly *there*----Only when we are God-filled are we truly human’ (Ruth Burrows, *Interior Castle Explored* P. 112). Until we reach God we are discontented with ourselves, our limitations, the duration of time, the pressure of our bodies; the paradoxical conclusion of the *Castle* is that union with God- the wholly and sovereignly ‘unworldly’, the utterly free and indifferent- is the only thing that will stop time and mortality and flesh feeling alien or insulting or frustrating. It is as united with God that we learn to be where we are in the world.

Teresa's history is – not surprisingly – vividly present in her thinking about the Christian life. A story that is full of discontinuities, frustrations, false starts and risks will inevitably generate a theology that stresses how hard and how strange a thing it is to ‘be where we are in the world’. She assumes that we are likely to be strangers to ourselves and that we (like her beloved Augustine) need

a measure of divine violence to be brought home: it is not natural to us to be natural.-----The question to which she is finally seeking an answer is how a self, compulsively at odds with its own real good and liable to produce any real number of self justifying and self flattering fantasies may come to *belong* in the single movement of God's love, making and affirming and renewing the concrete world of concrete bodies in communication. The seventh mansions of the *Castle* are probably her clearest testimony to the possibility- and the joy- of that belonging.”

(*Teresa of Avila*, Rowan Williams, 1991, Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series (Ed. B. Davies O.P. Pp. 139-140)

Adrian Jones



Two years ago I asked my dad what it meant to him to be involved in World War 2. “Not much really” he replied. “I went to help some hurting people, that’s all”. After some silence I asked: “ If being involved was unimportant to you, why do you mention the war 23 times in your book?” {He published his memoir *A Doctor Looks at the Bible* in 1989}. “Oh did I?” he asked, with a surprised tone.

Next day I returned to the war days musing with some questions. I listened for two hours as dad explained more about his motivation, his experiences, the people he met and their influence on him. At the end he said “Thankyou for asking those questions. Until this discussion I had no idea how God used my war experiences to prepare me for my future training and medical work.”

Dad always had difficulty understanding how I had regular one hour conversations with other men in which I heard their journey in life but did not try to fix their problems. That day, as I companioned him to reflect on his past, gave him a glimpse of why spiritual direction adds value to a pilgrim’s understanding and appreciation of providence in their personal journey.

Two months ago it was my turn to be in dad’s presence and to reflect on my journey with him. I sat beside his bed as he labored to breathe the oxygen provided for him. He could no longer speak, though the steady gaze of his eyes told me he knew I was with him in the weakest moment of his life.

After 12 hours of alternately speaking, reading scripture and singing words of comfort, with brief prayers, I watched his hands going red. I realized that blood was not getting back to his heart. The doctor had warned me “He will go today, his heart will stop”.

In my mind thoughts began to form into words and, since his peaceful passing 3 hours later, they have shaped as both a farewell to him and a gift to me; an acute appreciation for all he did in his (almost) 98 years.

It seems as if, before dad left, accompanied me to the open door of my life with a reminder of what he offered as a heritage and example to nourish me. So I wrote:

THOSE HANDS held me as a baby; delivered my sister ten years later; spanked me; cut open the sick; bound up bruises; stitched up wounds; held a stethoscope to thousands of hearts; drove him to work; watered the gardens; picked hundreds of handfuls of roses; fought bush fires; wrote on the back of war-time photographs so I could know ‘where and when’; collected eggs and cleaned them to earn his keep; wrote prescriptions which only pharmacists could magically interpret; wrote cheques to support me; typed a whole book; injected penicillin; threw footballs on cold mornings for me to catch; opened books and marked his favorite passages; turned the pages of his bible.

And on the final day of his earthly life those hands did something I never remembered feeling before: **he held my hand.**

Valè Harrold Steward from your grateful son: John H Steward, July 2015

I'll be honest – I've always struggled with being part of a community. Whether it was being at school or being a part of my family, being a member of the Physical Culture club I attended as a girl or a member of an administration team in my working life, I've always felt a bit of a misfit. It wasn't that I didn't want to be a part of these communities – I desperately did – I just always carried with me a sense of not quite fitting in.

Looking back I often wonder whether anyone would have noticed – I mean, I wore all the 'right clothes', I did all the things everyone else was doing, in fact I tried very hard not to draw attention to myself, not to stand out, so that I would be just like everyone else, yet right into adulthood that nagging feeling remained. I just didn't belong. I just never seemed to know what to say, what to do, how to be, when a part of a larger group.

And it's not that different these days either, I'm afraid to admit. I'm a part of numerous communities – my church, the Residential Program for Spiritual Direction, the ANSD being just a few of them. I love them all – the people are wonderful; all of these communities bring me great joy and I've learned so much from being a part of them – but most of the time I find participating in these communities just plain *hard work*. Maybe it's because I'm high on the MBTI introvert scale, maybe it's because I'm a 6 on the Enneagram and constantly scanning for danger, or maybe it's because I really am a misfit – I've no doubt there are many layers to my responses and reactions to being a part of community, too numerous and complex to address here - but show me a community and invite me to be a part of it and the first thing I will do is scan for all possible avenues of escape! A particularly insightful and observant woman at my church once said to me that she noticed I tended to live on the edge of our community – and she was right. It's much easier to run away from the edge than the middle!

It was at a recent ANSD meeting in Sydney with Michael Whelan as the guest speaker that all of this came into sharp focus for me. Michael was speaking on Thomas Merton, and early in his presentation he made the comment, "*I don't fit, but I do belong.*" Now, I wish I'd taken more specific notes or somehow referenced them better, because as I've written it in my notebook, it almost seems like a passing comment, and I don't recall if it originated from Merton or from Michael, but for me it was a brilliant, dazzling, light bulb moment:

"I don't fit, but I do belong."

There is a big difference between fitting and belonging. Like the children's Shape-Fit toy, we all come in different shapes and sizes. Some of us are crosses, some of us are squares, some of us are circles, and we don't all fit in the same hole, no matter how hard we try. I have a clear childhood memory of deciding I was going to make that square peg fit through the round hole if it was the last thing I ever did (and despite years of sheer determination and creative problem-solving techniques, I never made it happen – either literally or figuratively!) Yet the shapes all belong to the same toy. They all have their space and place and they all play a part. If one piece were to be missing, it would not be complete.

Suddenly the significance of being a part of a community, particularly a community of followers of Christ, dawned on me. It's not about fitting in – it's about belonging. I belong because Christ makes it so. This is a kind of belonging which is both individual and corporate, both intensely personal and intentionally communal. What I react against is in fact my greatest teacher – it is from within a community, by my union with others, that I will be able to learn with increasing depth and clarity *who I am*. Jesus knew this, of course, which is one of the reasons he gathered his disciples around him and took them with him everywhere he went (although I confess to a sense of relief that there were times when he also withdrew from community as well!)

continued pg

Rather than pursuing my desire to force that square peg into the round hole, and maybe finally ridding myself of that nagging sense of not fitting, I might instead learn how to live with the paradox – I don't fit. I will probably never feel that I do. But it no longer matters as much, because I *do*, and will always, *belong*.

Sally Jones works as a Spiritual Mentor to theological students and others who are seeking to deepen their walks with God. She is in her third year of the RPSD course and also works part time as a Personal Trainer! She has a lovely husband, 3 sons and lives in Hills District of Sydney.

If only
then maybe
I might have
done it differently
not blown the chance
to make my mark

If only
then perhaps
I could have
said it succinctly
not foot in mouth
to make my point

If only
then surely
I would have
chosen it carefully
not lacking the taste
to impress the rest

If only
then actually
I could be content
with the skin I'm in
not wanting to be
anything but me

dtw



*Sydney Group: Fr Michael Whelan speaking on Thomas Merton
photos: Sally Longley*

Thank you Sally Longley, for sharing these photos of the recent Sydney Group gathering with Fr Michael Whelan. If you have photos of your regional group activities please send them to the editor. It is a great way of sharing what ANSD is up to around the country.



The 31st January, 2015 marks one hundred years since the birth of Thomas Merton, monk, writer, poet, peace activist.

The recent Papal Encyclical highlights the importance of Ecospirituality for us now. Thomas Merton understood that importance in the 1960's. As spiritual directors we too must integrate that understanding within our own spirituality and help to open it for others as well.

As Merton wrote in an untitled poem,

"All theology is a kind of birthday
Each one who is born
Comes into the world as a question
For which old answers
Are not sufficient..."

(*In the Dark before Dawn: New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*).

In ***Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*** Merton indicates further how important questions are to him:

The journals are "an implicit dialogue with other minds, a dialogue in which questions are raised. But do not expect to find "my answers". I do not have clear answers to current questions. I do have questions, and, as a matter of fact, I think a man is known better by his questions than by his answers. To make known his questions is no doubt, to come out in the open oneself. I am not in the market for the ready-made and wholesale answers so easily volunteered by the public and I question nothing so much as the viability of public and popular answers, including some of those which claim to be the most progressive." (*Conjectures: Preface (xviii)*).

All his life Merton searched out questions in areas of significance to him. The most significant was his search to be both open to and to explore the meaning of contemplation and solitude. But as pilgrim and spiritual seeker, as a lover of this cosmos and all it contained he was drawn to understand and confront the problems of violence and technology his time and culture were experiencing. In seeking to understand violence he came to understand peace. His reading and research on the subject of peace brought him into contact with the new understandings developing in the fields of evolution and ecology.

The work which gave the original impetus to the ecological movement was Rachel Carson's text, *Silent Spring*. On December 11th, 1962, Merton wrote:

Very cold. Some snow. Bright, silent afternoon.

*I have been shocked at a notice of a new book by Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*), on what is happening to birds as a result of the indiscriminate use of poisons (which do not manage to kill all the insects they intend to kill)*

*Someone will say; you worry about birds: why not worry about people? I worry about birds and people. We are in the world and part of it and we are destroying everything because we are destroying ourselves, spiritually, morally and in every way. . . I want to get this book. Why? Because this is a truth I regard as very significant and I want to know more about it. (*Turning Toward the World: 1997: 274-5*).*

The last sentence is Merton's challenge to us today as people who love our world, the cosmos, and honour the God who loves all that is. Merton challenges us to continually seek out those who speak the truth. Truth for Merton is the place where non-violence resides.

Merton does not idealise nature as the following reveals:

Should I really experience nature as alien and heartless? Should I be prepared to imagine that this alienation from nature is real and that an attitude of sympathy, of oneness with it, is only imaginary? On the contrary – we have a choice of projections. Our attitude towards nature is simply an extension of our attitudes toward ourselves, and toward one another. We are free to be at peace with ourselves and also with nature.

*Or are we?
(Conjectures 1966::135)*

Merton's questions are still ours today. While I am writing the birds are chirping very loudly outside. Perhaps warning that a storm is coming or perhaps they are just being birds as Merton would say. What a different place this world would be if they were silenced!

In a world in need of hope let everything around us remind us that nature, the first book of divine revelation is still speaking to us. In his journals Merton gives expression to his love of nature. The writing is fragmented because he is writing for himself and responding with immediacy to his surroundings.

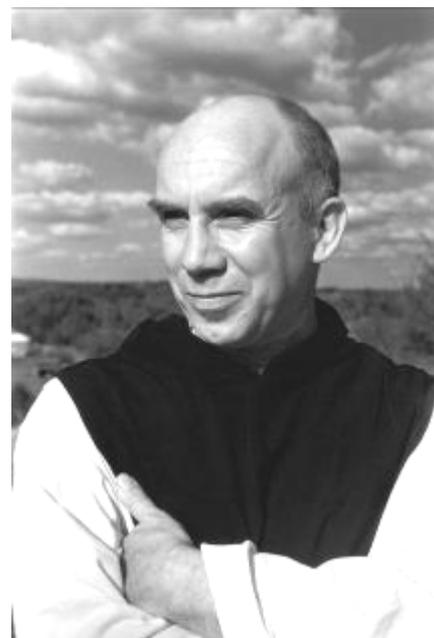
Deep peace. Sheep on the slopes behind the sheep barn. The new trellises in the novitiate garden leaning and sagging. A cardinal singing suddenly in the walnut tree, and piles of fragrant logs all around the wood shed, waiting to be cut in bad weather.

*I looked at all this in great tranquillity, with my soul and spirit quiet. For me landscape seems to be important for contemplation . . . anyway I have no scruples about loving it.
(When the Trees Say Nothing: 2003:53)*

*I cannot have enough of the hours of silence when nothing happens. When the clouds go by. When the trees say nothing. When the birds sing. I am completely addicted to the realisation that just being there is enough and to add something else is to mess it all up.
(When the Trees Say Nothing: 2003:177)*

May Merton's love of all things in their being become ours in our lives and in our ministry.

Colleen O'Sullivan rsj



'The whole country was lighted by a searing light with an intensity many times that of the midday sun. It had to be witnessed to be realised.' Second World War US General Farrell was writing about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. It is one of the most terrible ironies that it should have been on August 6, the traditional Feast of the Transfiguration. August 6 2015 marks the 70th anniversary. Farrell went on to use words that might have appeared so natural to Peter and James and John on the mountain. 'It made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare to tamper with the forces reserved to the Almighty.' The 3 disciples had the glorious vision of the transfigured Christ, a foretaste of his resurrection glory on what was sacred ground. Hiroshima then and for many years to follow became a hell on earth, obliterated and poisoned.

Destruction and Transfiguration: on the one hand, the human wilfulness to distort and disfigure God's image in the world and on the other, the possibility of the glory and fulfilment of humanity in Jesus Christ. "There is nothing on earth", said Pascal, "that does not show either the wretchedness of humanity or the mercy of God; either the weakness of humanity without God, or the strength of humanity with God"

Indeed, we are 'puny'. Natural disasters like floods and earthquakes reveal just how fragile we are. So do the struggles and cries for freedom where corrupt leaders dare to plunder and disenfranchise their people, or where terror reigns and humanity is distorted and disfigured. We are not God, yet all too often it seems that we act as if we are the chief executives of the universe. Baron Friedrich von Hugel, a classic master of prayer, once said, "I want you to hold very clearly the otherness of God and the littleness of humanity. If you don't get that you can't have adoration, and you cannot have religion without adoration." Adoration gives God proper worth. That is the meaning of the word 'worship': worth-ship – or giving God glorious worth. We do not come to God as equal to equal. We are creatures before a Creator. The marvel is that God takes us creatures into divine-human intimacy and gives us proper worth! Our lives are magnified by God. The psalmist writes, 'What are we, that you should be mindful of us: what are we that you should care for us? Yet you have made us little less than gods: and have crowned us with glory and honour.' (Ps 8. 5-6) In the presence and grace of Divine Love we are placed on higher, sacred ground.

In the arresting movie *The Sunset Limited*, with 2 actors only, a philosophical debate ensues between Samuel L Jackson, a black ex con-man, and a white suicidal professor, Tommy Lee Jones. In a moment of poignant tension, Jackson exclaims, "If it hasn't got the lingering scent of divinity to it, I don't want to listen".

The disciples are awakened by the sight and the voice and the scent of divinity on the Transfiguration Mount. That lingering scent would come back to disturb and revive them again and again. At this point they still have much to learn, for the Christ they follow will have to suffer. This Christ will also bear fragility, vulnerability, torture, disfigurement and death before he accomplishes his glory. But this is the paradox of Grace and the mystery of Faith. Bound up in this is the paradox of our own humanity and its glorious vocation. You often hear people say, "I'm only human". Christ came to make us very human, *completely* human. We each have an immeasurable capacity for sheer loveliness, grace and blessing upon others, bearing both pain and joy. Just look to the light and capture the lingering scent all around!

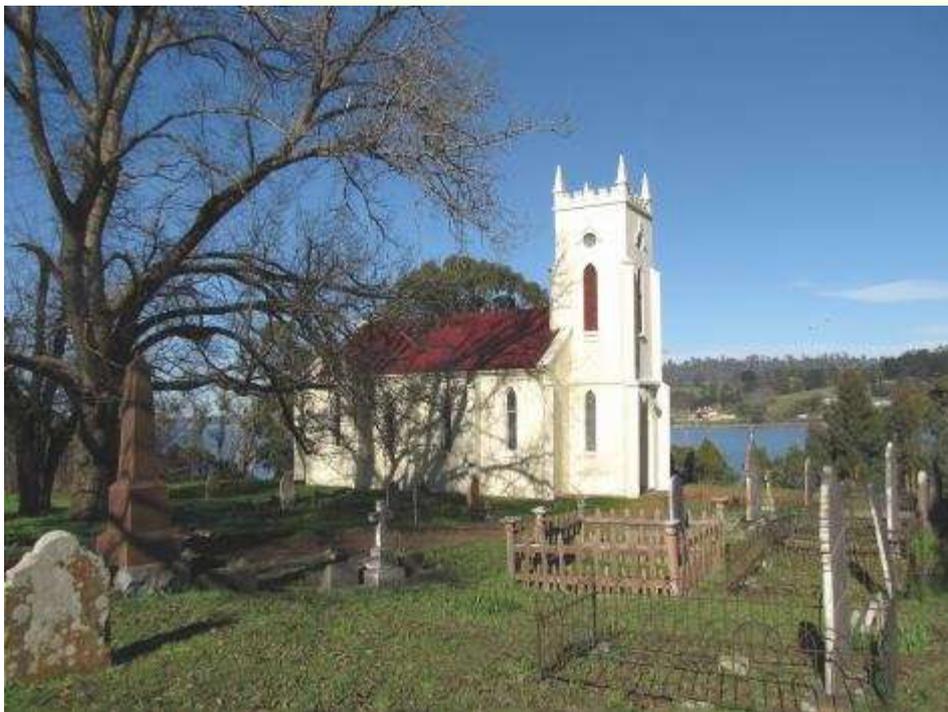
The Transfigured Christ, the Beloved Son, confirmed and attested to by the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah on the holy mount, is the symbol and foretaste of all that we might be. Oppression, domination, war and violence display the worst disfiguration of our humanity. But they do not have the final word. The Westminster Confession states that our chief end is to worship God and enjoy God for ever. Furthermore, we are called to love all who are made in God's image as we love ourselves. Before us are the way of light and the way of darkness. Let light and love be our pilgrimage. May we be transformed in Christ.

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Elsie Landstrom in *Inward Light* captures the tension in *Song to My Other Self*

Over the years I have caught glimpses of you in the mirror, wicked;
in a sudden stridency in my own voice, have heard you mock me;
in the tightening of my muscles felt the pull of your anger and the whine
of your greed twist my countenance;
felt your indifference blank my face when pity was called for.
You are lurking under every kind act I do, ready to defeat me.
Lately, rather than drop the lid of my shock over your intrusion,
I have looked for you with new eyes
opened to your tricks, but more,
opened to your rootedness in life.
Come, I open my arms to you also, once-dread stranger.
Come, as a friend I would welcome you to stretch your apartments
within me from the cramped to comforting side.
Thus I would disarm you.
For I have recently learned, looking straight into your eyes:
The holiness of God is everywhere.

David Thornton-Wakeford



Windermere Church—Tamar River Tasmania—photo: D. Stephenson