



Thin Places

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Beauty . . . by Dr. Jere Lantz

A friend of mine closes each of his emails with a quotation from Kurt Vonnegut:

“Let this be my epitaph,

‘The only proof he needed of the existence of God was music.’”

Vonnegut was no theologian, and I have no idea what is really written on his tombstone. But his thought resonates with what I have come to hold close to my heart. There is plenty of ugliness, disaster, tragedy and misfortune in the world. We are besieged by bad news every day. To continue to live in the world, to have some confidence that things can get better . . . to hold onto hope . . . to believe that God is out there or in here somewhere, I need something in my life through which I can see past the detritus of these times. And—after the love of my family—what I rely on most is beauty.

Minneapolis-born philosopher/writer Robert Pirsig, in his 1974 bestselling novel, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*, posited that the key contributor to a good life is “quality.” I remember being taken by Pirsig’s book when it came out, but what I took from it and what I have kept from it was not his exploration of the metaphysics of quality, but the encouragement to ask what—for me—is most central to my being human, what contributes most to the quality of my life?

And each time I ask, my answer is *beauty*.

It is not easy for everyone to understand this conviction. Some years ago I joined a crowd of fellow artists for a “Day on the Hill,” lobbying our state legislature in St. Paul about the importance of the arts. I ended up with a few of my colleagues in the office of the Speaker of the House, who wanted tangible evidence of the importance of the arts. I told him that tangible evidence wasn’t the point. “What price can you put on a sunrise over Lake Superior?” I asked. He smiled. Perhaps he would not ever become a great advocate for the arts, but he did understand our effort and would not stand in its way.

Whether a sunrise, a campfire, a wave breaking on the beach, a portrait by Rembrandt, a sonnet by Keats, a sculpture by Paul Granlund or a symphony by Beethoven, an experience of beauty can take me out of the dreariness of my life into a place where love, peace and God are possible, even close.

I was young in a tumultuous time when many of my generation sought to escape our troubled existence through drugs. My “drug” then, as now, was beauty. The druggies escaped by dulling their senses and finding a false world; my escape into a work of art heightened my awareness, sharpened my senses, and gave me a deeper understanding of the

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Look for *Thin Places* at: www.thinplaces.us or www.ewestminster.org/thin_places

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An ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, published by the Spiritual Growth Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church



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world. Whether in front of a painting or listening to a choir, I enter a world beyond words, where there is no sense of time or self, where for a few moments I can leave a life of endless becoming and enter, however briefly, a state of pure being. What I experience then is very like deep prayer, contemplation or meditation. It is then I feel most truly human.

There is one such transcendent moment that comes each Christmas Eve at the close of our evening services at Westminster. Before the benediction, three chimes are sounded from a church tower, symbolizing the coming of Christmas. Though I suppose anyone could do the job, ringing those chimes is a chore I keep for myself. Before going back into the tower to find the chime, I stand at the rear of the sanctuary balcony, listening as choir and congregation sing “Silent Night,” watching the candles held by the choir as they move down the aisles.

For a moment I am overcome by the beauty of music, light, and Christmas. I transcend the anxieties of the season and find a moment of peace, in touch with the best part of my humanity and closer to God.

Jere Lantz has been making music in Minnesota since 1977, currently serving as music director of the Rochester Symphony Orchestra and Chorale, Minneapolis Pops Orchestra, and Minnetonka Choral Society. Jere's spiritual journey has been somewhat winding. He has been a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian, married a Lutheran, and currently teaches part-time at a Catholic high school. He considers himself a musical evangelist, not just making good music but bringing the stories and message behind the music to a wide public. He has been choir director at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis for twelve years and can be reached at jlantz@wpc-mpls.org.

Do you know of anyone who might like to receive *Thin Places?* (It's sent free to all who request it.)

Or do you know of an up-coming Opportunity that might be of interest to others?

If 'yes' to either, please contact Kathy Fisher at:
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

“Beauty, . . . 2. Sound or appearance that arouses a strong, contemplative delight.”

*The American Heritage Dictionary
of the American Language*

Awakening and Deepening:

The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living

Ask ten people what contemplative means, and you are likely to get ten different answers. At The Merton Institute, we believe that how we live within our relationships defines our contemplative being. Thomas Merton identified four core relationships that are integral to the path of being contemplative: with our selves, with God, with others, and with nature. By engaging in these relationships, we deepen our contemplative essence.

Each of the Institute's resources encourages individuals and groups to see how their every day life is their spiritual life. Each one also engenders the Institute's mission of awakening interest in—and deepening the understanding of—contemplative living.

Drawing from the writings of Thomas Merton, our resources provide tools and practices for individuals and groups to be more contemplative. These resources include:

- **Weekly email reflections** based upon Merton's writings, each reflection including a "contemplative pause," a question that encourages examination into how you are being contemplative.
- **Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton**, a popular small group resource, offers selections from the writings of Merton and other spiritual masters. Each booklet in the ten volume series focuses on a particular theme, like "Entering into the School of Your Experience." Members of the group learn contemplative dialogue and are encouraged to practice it between sessions. A **Bridges** informative packet and guide is also available.
- **Bethany Spring**, The Merton Institute Retreat Center, located one mile from the Abbey of Gethsemani, is a quiet, peace-filled space. Guests are invited to attend Center-sponsored retreats, come away for a private retreat, or share the space with their own group.
- **The Thomas Merton Spiritual Development Program**, based upon the life of Thomas Merton, is a rich example-based resource that encourages folks to be contemplative and to practice social justice. People of all ages—from high school students to adults—have found this guide beneficial to their spiritual journeys.
- **Contemplative Connections**, a series of essays, provides insights to being more contemplative.
- **Lent and Advent email reflections**, based upon the writings of Thomas Merton and scripture, provide a rich daily source during these special seasons. Each reflection incorporates a Merton selection that mirrors the daily Psalm.

The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living, located in Louisville, Kentucky, has a virtual community of 14,000 individuals. Although programs are offered both in Louisville, Kentucky, and at Bethany Spring, virtual programs are available for our global community.

For more information regarding all of our programs and resources:

The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living
415 West Muhammad Ali Blvd.
Louisville, KY 40202 or
contactus@mertoninstitute.org or 502.583.6117
or www.mertoninstitute.org.

Evensong with Folk Harp and Hammered Dulcimer

Evensong worship at St. Paul's UCC is a contemplative service centered around candlelight, singing the music of Iona and Taizé and other chants, with three opportunities for extended prayer and meditation.

Stay for wonderful hospitality following the worship. Parking is available in the lot off Milton. We are an Earthwise and Open and Affirming Congregation:

First Sundays, 5:15-6:00 p.m.

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
900 Summit Avenue, St. Paul

For information: sppastor@comcast.net or
www.spuconsummit.org.

Advent Evening Prayer

These Advent Monday Evening Prayers at Sabbath House have been welcomed by many over the years.

Again this year, as this First Season of the Church Year unfolds, you are invited to take some time apart for Seasonal Readings, for Quiet, for Music with Local Musicians. Come as you are. All are welcome:

The Mondays of Advent, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

“Notes on paper . . .”

“The arts are the most pervasive, persistent and powerful affirmation of the life force in the man-thing. Stone shaped into spirit. Notes on paper into sound into silent understanding. . . .

Across the boundaries of time and space, chance and malice, the arts are the open hand of man reaching for his brother.”

Robert Shaw
speaking at the Westminster Town Hall Forum,
March 21, 1985 in celebration of J. S. Bach's 300th birthday

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Ave. South, Minneapolis
For information: 612.822.2623

South of the River Contemplative Group

Our Contemplative Spiritual Practices is a small group coming together, learning new ways to pray, and sharing the struggles of living attentively and compassionately and contemplatively in a busy world.

Currently we are using the excellent *Bridges to Contemplative Living Series* from the Thomas Merton Institute. People from any church or denomination are most welcome—even encouraged to come:

Second Wednesdays, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Easter Lutheran Church, 4200 Pilot Knob Road, Eagan
For information: juliemccarty@usfamily.net
or 651-686-5871 or www.easter.org.

Taizé Prayer Service

Preparation and supportive ministries for these monthly services are shared by our parish and Prospect Park United Methodist Church. We have invited Faith Mennonite to join us, and our hope is to gather even more folks from our neighboring churches in the true ecumenical spirit encouraged by the Community at Taizé. This month:

Dr. Reuben Chirambo

With deep sorrow it must be announced that Reuben Chirambo—whose tribute to his mother and the reality of unconditional love was the lead meditation in last summer's issue (www.thinplaces.us)—died suddenly in Cape Town on 6 October 2011 of an undetected and undiagnosed melanoma.

Faculty members at the University of Cape Town where he taught African Literature wrote, “It is with immense sadness that we mark the passing away of our dear friend and colleague, Dr. Reuben Chirambo, whom we remember for his generosity of spirit, his commitment to students, his selflessness with his time, his scholarship and his sense of humor.”

Reuben was 49 and the principal support for his extended family. He is survived by his wife, two daughters, many relatives, and many friends in Malawi, South Africa, and the Twin Cities, where he lived for six years while completing his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. His life-wish (as he wrote at the end of his meditation) was to pass on what he had received from his mother and “to plant new seeds which will thrive in and for others.”

Weds., Dec. 14, 7:00-8:00 p.m., St. Francis Cabrini
Weds., Jan. 25, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Prospect Park UMC,
 22 Orlin Ave. SE, Mpls.

Weds., Feb. 29, 7:00-8:00 p.m., St. Francis Cabrini
 St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church
 1500 Franklin Avenue SE, Minneapolis
 Info: 612.339.3023, ext. 115 or chris@cabrinimn.org.

Relationship and Prayer

Colonial Church's long-time Centering Prayer group is changing its meeting times, and getting better than ever.

As before, we'll begin with *Lectio Divina* and Centering Prayer. Then, after a break, we'll have time for new and old relationships to be deepened and for discussion as we learn more about prayer and the personal growth and transformation that prayer can bring:

First and Third Thursdays, 6:45-8:15 p.m.

Colonial Church of Edina, 6200 Colonial Way, Edina
 in the Hearth Room

For information: 952.926.2711 or
www.colonialchurch.org or carolynyoung1@comcast.net.

Centering Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Centering Prayer is an ancient and contemporary way of prayer. It is a simple method of alert receptivity and consent to God's presence. Gather with the sisters and members of all faiths to ponder God's presence in your life. Prepare yourself to receive the gift of a closer union with God during 20 minutes of silence. There will then be a time for *Lectio Divina*:

Third Thursdays, 6:00-7:00 p.m.

also:

Taizé Prayer, First Thursdays, 6:00-7:00 p.m.

St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, in the Gathering Space
 For information: 320.632.0668 or www.fslf.org or
franciscanlife@fslf.org.

"I once heard Arthur Rubenstein being asked to share his experience of playing Chopin's *Nocturnes*. He said,

'I do not know what it is. But over and over again I have had the experience of being in a crowded concert hall playing the *Nocturnes*, and I feel everyone in the room waiting for the next note.'

In this moment of waiting, all present find contemplative community in their oneness with one another, in the boundless mystery that enraptures them."

James Finley, *The Contemplative Heart*

Falling Upward: The Spirit of Retirement

This two day retreat is designed especially for those in or approaching retirement. For many of us, this important life transition brings up essential spiritual questions: who am I now? what is the spiritual purpose of this stage of my life? why do I feel this "bright sadness"?

We'll look at wisdom figures ancient and modern, consulting in particular Richard Rohr's new book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*.

We'll employ contemplative practices and simple spiritual exercises to hear the wisdom of our own "still, small voice." Together we'll explore the questions that matter most to us now—and share our discoveries:

Saturday, December 3, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 4, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

The House of Prayer in the City
 825 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis

For information or registration for this or other opportunities at the House of Prayer in the City or the House of Prayer, Collegeville: 320.363.3293 or
houseprayer@csbsju.edu or www.ehouseofprayer.org or
www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopcacity.html.

A Christmas Celtic Evening Prayer

This evening's service—which is normally the high point of the annual cycle of Celtic Evening Prayers that take place on the **Second Thursday** of each month—will include traditional Celtic music on authentic Celtic instruments and Christmas readings from Scripture, with time for silence and meditation, and for prayer.

It will end with all of us encircling the Chapel with candlelight, a powerful way to see and experience the circle of the community of believers. There will be a time for fellowship afterwards:

Thursday, December 8, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church
 1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis
 Information: 612.322.3421 or kfisher@wpc-mpls.org.

Advent Day of Contemplative Prayer

During Advent—a time of waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Christmas mysteries—a day of contemplative prayer provides a more extended and focused time to deepen our existing practice of meditation. On this day, a pattern of sitting and walking meditations, teachings, mindful movements and chanting will offer an experience of prayer and silence:

Saturday, December 10, 8:30 a.m.-3:15 p.m.

also:

**When Shadows Hold Their Breath:
 A Winter Solstice Celebration**

"There is a certain slant of light," Emily Dickinson wrote, on winter afternoons. "When it comes, the Landscape listens—Shadows— hold their breath."

In this time of quiet stillness, when the winter landscape listens, we gather to celebrate the Winter Solstice and the slant of light it brings. With candles and shadow, with poetry, music and silence, we will hold the night's darkness and its light, its stillness and its song:

Wednesday, December 21, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration for this or up-coming opportunities in 2012: wisdomways@csjstpaul.org or 651.696.2788 or www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

A Rest and Renewal Retreat

Many have found these personalized retreats to be among "the best of ARC," enriched by the resident community (rather than a "staff") who will be your hosts.

R&R Retreats provide a balance of fellowship and time alone to nurture your inner peace. Join the community (if you wish) in silent prayer, labyrinth walks, guided meditations, home-cooked meals, and more. The "Sample Daily Schedule" on the ARC web-site is particularly indicative of what the experience will be like:

Tuesdays-Thurs., Dec. 13-15, Jan. 24-26, Feb. 14-16

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Center, Stanchfield, MN
For information or registration: 763.689.3540 or www.arcretreat.org or arcretreat@hotmail.com.

Christmas Quiet

An annual candlelit service to ponder the gift of Christ's coming to our world. Come and join us for this meaningful Christos Advent tradition as we lift our voices and hearts to God in song and in silence. A time for holiday refreshments and conversation follows:

Tuesday, Dec. 13, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

also:

New Year's Quiet, Monday, Dec. 31, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

and:

Pilgrimage of Imagination: Advent and Lent

Again this year, we will offer a time to gather to recount the most profound stories of God's love for humanity, told especially through the stories of Advent and Lent:

Preparation . . . Birth . . . Passion . . . Joy . . .

Through the gifts of scripture, imagination, symbols and music, we will open ourselves to God in prayer. Join us for these profound contemplative prayer experiences, our gift to you as we celebrate God's gift to all:

The Mondays of Advent, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Mondays of Lent, beginning Mar. 26, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

For information or registration: www.christoscenter.org or 651.653.8207 or janet@christoscenter.org.

Ecumenical Taizé Evening Prayer

All are welcome for this time of sung prayers from Taizé, music, and silence:

Thurs., Dec. 15, March 8 & 29, April 12, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

St. Hubert Church, 8201 Main Street, Chanhassen
For information: 952.934.9106 or www.sthubert.org.

A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

This is a traditional Christmas carol service, based on that offered at King's College, Cambridge, England, on Christmas Eve afternoon each year. During the service—through Scripture and carols—we are reminded of God's loving purposes, from the first days of our creation to the glory of the Incarnation, the birth of the Christ Child. Childcare is available at both services:

Sunday, December 18, 5:00-6:30 p.m., and

Friday, December 23, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis

For information on this, our Thursday morning Contemplative Prayer & other upcoming opportunities: 612.870.7800 or www.ourcathedral.org.

The live radio broadcast from King's College, Cambridge, of "A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" is on Saturday, December 24, 9:00-10:30 a.m.—this service has been broadcast by the BBC every year since 1928, and by Minnesota Public Radio (the music channel) since 1978.

End the Old Year in Silence; Start the New in Peace

Join our Centering Prayer group (which normally meets every other Saturday morning, 9:30-11:30) for Sr. Mary White on "Reawakening the New," for two sessions of

"Who can afford to live without beauty?

Beauty fills us with passion;

it graces us with joy and lights up our existence.

A landscape, a piece of music, a film, a dance—

suddenly all dreariness is gone,

we are left bewitched and dazzled;

if we get lost in dark despair,

Beauty takes us back to Center."

Piero Ferrucci, *Beauty and the Soul*

Centering Prayer, and holiday treats:

Saturday, December 31, 9:30-11:30 p.m.

St. Matthew's Catholic Church, in the Parish Hall
490 Hall Street, West St. Paul

Information: klindstrom@usfamily.net or 952.829.1386.

St. Matthew's Episcopal, 2136 Carter Avenue, St. Paul, also has a Centering Prayer group, which normally meets each Saturday morning, 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Information: 651.645.3058 or rector@stmatthewsmn.org.

Crossing the Threshold

This one-of-a-kind retreat will help participants celebrate the coming of a New Year in the peace of a Benedictine Monastery. This year we will explore—using the process of *Visio Divina*—the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of John to journey inward toward the sacred center of our hearts.

Each person who comes will receive a copy of "Seeing the Word," which illuminates this great text.

You will also be invited to join the monastic community for prayer, reflection, conversation and silence:

Sat., Dec. 31, at 3:00 p.m.-Sun., Jan. 1, at 10:00 a.m.
also:

Men's Contemplative Spirituality Group,

Fourth Mondays, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Centering Prayer Group,

Every Wednesday, 6:30-7:20 a.m.

Taizé Prayer, Third Fridays, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.777.7251 or benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org or www.stpaulsmonastery.org.

Renew My Heart

The heart is where a person's deepest feelings, core personality traits, and basic spirituality reside. We are able to grow in holiness only because God chooses to give us "a new heart and a new spirit." With a "listening heart" we discover God's purpose and plan for us.

These two retreats will help us imitate more deeply "the Sacred Heart" of Jesus, a Heart whose greatest desire is to help foster a "change of heart" in us:

Silent Weekend Retreat for Men

Friday, Jan. 13, at 7:00 p.m.-Sun., Jan. 15, after lunch

Silent Weekend Retreat for Women

Friday, Jan. 27, at 7:00 p.m.-Sun., Jan. 29, after lunch

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration: 763.682.1394 or www.kingshouse.com or jhanson@kingshouse.com.

On Holy Ground: Exploring Your Spiritual Experiences through Writing

Most of us experience times and episodes in our lives when something extraordinary breaks into our normal routines. For a moment at least we sense we are on sacred ground. How can we capture the meaning inherent in these experiences?

This workshop is designed to help participants explore the boundary between our day-to-day lives and the world of spirit through *Scriptio Divina*, through personal writing seen and understood as a spiritual practice:

Saturday, February 25, 9:00 a.m.-noon

Plymouth Congregational Church

1900 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis

For information or registration for this or other upcoming Opportunities: churchinfo@plymouth.org or 612.871.7400 or www.plymouth.org.

Looking Forward:

Have you thought about visiting the Taizé Community in France? Would Chicago be Closer?

A Taizé gathering, "Pilgrimage of Trust across the Earth," will take place in Chicago over the Memorial Day Weekend next May. Participants will come together—much as they do at Taizé itself—for prayer, reflection, workshops and fellowship.

Beginning in February, three Taizé brothers will be living in Chicago and coordinating preparations in the city and the region. They will be working with friends from Chicago to find accommodations with families for the young adults coming from outside the metro area. They will also travel in the U. S. and Canada to stimulate interest in the Chicago weekend.

A detailed program and a DVD especially made for the Chicago meeting will be available soon. This seems like a very special up-coming opportunity:

Friday, May 25, early evening-Mon., May 28, at noon

Sponsored and organized by the Taizé Community, to be held at DePaul University

For information: chicago2012@taize.fr or www.taize.fr/chicago.

If you are a young adult (ages 18-30) and might like to be part of a group going to the Pilgrimage of Trust from Minnesota, please contact Megan Gage-Finn:

mgage-finn@wpc-mpls.org.

If you would like to be a part of a group that might invite the Brothers to Minnesota before the May gathering, please contact: thinplaces_us@msn.com.

***A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth, and the Human Soul*, by John Philip Newell**

This is one of two books just published by John Philip Newell—who, with Margaret Guenther, was recognized on November 3 as the winner of the just-established **Shalem Contemplative Voices Award**.

The new harmony in John Philip Newell's *A New Harmony* springs from his deeply held belief that—in a world that is increasingly fragmented and contentious—we are called to a re-awakened vision of life's essential oneness, that wellness is found not in isolation but in relationship, that the healing of our brokenness and of our world's brokenness can begin if we—as individuals and as societies—recapture an awareness of the Oneness of all creation.

In the opening chapters, he explores the basic belief that was at the heart of all faith traditions, "the ancient harmony that is deep in the matter of the universe, the essential interwovenness of all things." Among the very many, here is one passage that captured attention:

- "Carl Jung speaks of 'moon-like consciousness,' a way of seeing in which we more readily perceive oneness than differentiation. When I walk under the light of the moon I am at times almost speechless with wonder. Under the moonlight, life's edges are not so sharply defined. The boundaries are less distinct. In the daylight [which we also certainly need], I have much more to say because I am seeing everything more analytically. The parts are easily distinguished from the whole.

Moon-like consciousness is ours in dream life and meditative practice and in some of our earliest memories of childhood . . . when we glimpsed the world of unitary vision rather than separation. What has happened to our moon-like consciousness? . . . "

In the second part Newell surveys "the brokenness of our harmony, whether as individuals and families or as nations and species." And in examining this brokenness he observes that, though there are other elements,

- "at the heart of our fragmentation, whether as nations and wisdom traditions or as races and societies, are various forms of fundamentalism. [By which I mean] any system that perceives reality in hard-edged terms, that boxes in truth with four fixed walls of definition. Fundamentalism

says that what the rest of humanity needs is inside these tight boundaries of truth. What humanity needs is *our* religious dogma. What all nations need is *our* ideal of democracy. What the world needs is the supremacy of *our* race. . . . And the list goes on and on.

At the heart of such hard-edged boundaries is fear. Fundamentalism has always reared its head at times of significant change. . . . "

In the third section he asks, "How can we be part of a new harmony? . . . How do we translate awareness into action?" And in shaping an answer he remembers,

- "As I walked through Glen Tromie, what emerged in my thoughts was the medieval concept of *anima mundi*, or 'the soul of the earth.' . . . I inhale the soul of creation in these landscapes and am alive to its oneness. It is what Teilhard de Chardin calls the 'fragrance' of the Feminine deep within the body of the earth, that quality within matter that awakens our desire for union. But the modern world, especially since the seventeenth century, has lost its awareness of the *anima mundi*. . . .

[And as Teilhard also says] the universe will be 'unified only through personal relations.' It will become one only under the influence of love. Teilhard calls this the 'amorization' of the universe, the healing of the world by loving. . . . "

"Moon-like consciousness," "such hard-edged boundaries," "the fragrance of the Feminine deep within the body of the earth," and "the amorization of the universe" caught one reader's attention, but they are only suggestive—not definitive—of the richness of this book.

The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living annually awards the

"Merton Prize for the Poetry of the Sacred,"

in a contest which has produced exceptional entries each year. The deadline for the 2012 contest is January 31. Poems are judged on "literary excellence, spiritual tenor, and human authenticity."

For complete Contest Guidelines:

go to www.mertoninstitute.org
then click on "retreats and programs"
and then click on "Merton Prize for the Poetry of the Sacred" (the 7th entry in the drop down list).

" Then (from the drop-down there), if you wish you may click on "Poetry of the Sacred 2010" for Stuart Anderson's *The Lioness*, which ends in a powerful and surprising image in the lines beginning:

**"Once I was a young hunter,
and my worship was swift! . . ."**

"There is in all visible things
an invisible fecundity,
a dimmed light,
a meek namelessness,
a hidden wholeness."

Thomas Merton



Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419

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“Beauty . . .”
“A gift . . .”



AFTERWORDS: “A gift . . .”

The Minnesota-Quetico Boundary Waters Canoe Area . . . late September . . . bright autumn colors everywhere . . . cool nights . . . nobody else around . . . alone in the wilderness . . . happily, just ourselves. Strong easterly winds on a larger lake . . . too strong . . . around a corner a cove, protected by tall surrounding pines . . . water almost calm within . . . making camp for the night . . . gratefully, snug. Glorious morning . . . no wind . . . bright sun . . . sounds carrying long-distances across the water . . . but mostly, the sounds of quietness . . . a deep peace without . . . and within.

Breakfast preparations underway . . . a bald eagle landing on the top of the tallest pine . . . perching there, silently surveying . . . breakfast, bathing in the lake, getting ready to go . . . the eagle still perching, watching, silent and alert. Just as it was time to go . . . the eagle lifting gently off the top of the tallest pine . . . flying directly overhead . . . dropping a feather . . . that landed almost in our hands. It felt like a gift had been given.

Later, on a five-day visit to five Native American congregations in South Dakota, we heard a sermon in which the Pastor linked the reverence in which Native Americans hold the eagle with their culture's deep awareness of the Great Spirit's presence in every part of the natural world. Afterwards, somewhat hesitantly, we told her our experience, telling her that we had brought the feather home but had then guiltily returned it to nature, knowing that it was illegal for non-Native Americans to collect eagle feathers in Minnesota. As she listened, we could see that she was entering completely and understandingly into our experience. And immediately she said that the feather was a gift, and that we could have kept it.

Thinking back, it seems sure that a gift was given. But what we had been given may not have been the feather itself, exactly. Thinking back, it now seems that the beauty and the peacefulness . . . there, in that cove, in the vastness of the Boundary Waters . . . perhaps enhanced by our "escape" from the winds of the world . . . had helped us to be more fully present, to be more open, to be more fully aware of God's presence in all of creation . . . and in all of life.

We were—and are—not alone, after all.