

THE DANCE OF THE INNER AND THE OUTER

Now that “millennium fever” has passed, I thought it would be a good time to start a Bible study on the book of Revelation at our church; not as a guidemap to the evening news, as some would have it, but as the theological and scriptural oddity that it is. As associate pastor to a very intellectual Berkeley congregation, I thought it would invigorate theological discussion in our people. I was not wrong about the vigorous discussion, but thus far, only one of our parishioners has attended. Instead, we have been getting about eight people who drive in from the next county just for the study. One couple has even joined the church!

Bewildered at the strange turnout, but pleased nonetheless, I began our first session by outlining various interpretive methods for understanding Revelation. We discussed the Preterist position held by Augustine (most everything in the book has already occurred in the past), the Futurist method propogated by the *Left Behind* media frenzy (depicts events in the immediate future), the Historical method (in which the book is a representation of the history of the church, past, and future), the Platonic position (in which it represents the ever-present battle between good and evil), and finally the Psychological perspective of Jung (depicting the continuing struggle of God/Self to displace the ego/self).

After outlining these, I informed them that we would be employing no single one of these methods, but that we would use all of them. After all, when you’re dealing with a crazy book like Revelation, you need all the help you can get.

In practice, however, we have been leaning pretty heavy on the Preterist position, as so much of the book can be tied to events contemporary to the

author. When we came to the “white stone” with a new name on it known only to the recipient promised to the church at Pergamum, however, we were stumped. What could this possibly mean?

I suggested we shift our interpretive method and see if another perspective could help us unpack it. We shifted from the external events of the Roman empire to the transpersonal theory of Carl Jung, and discussed the white stone again. As we talked, it became for us a symbol of individuation: the stone is self-contained, and the name known only to the recipient indicated for us that the one who holds it does not derive his or her identity from enmeshment with any group, familial, religious, or political. Instead, the identity is known only to the holder of the stone and to God. We decided that the holder’s identity is therefore shared with God, or *in* God.

Well, this excited us to no end. We were ready to move on, and leaped effortlessly back to the Roman Empire of the Preterist method. But the leap is now easier for us to make, and as we continue our study, we are becoming more comfortable jumping from outer realities to inner realities, enjoying the surprise of their interplay. And perhaps, more significantly, we are beginning to notice that interplay in daily lives as well. Even the composition of our group is a meditation on the interplay of “inside” and “outside”!

I certainly noticed this same interplay as I proofread this issue. While Graham Standish and Ellen McCormack’s first installment of their two-part article on Formative Spirituality focused on the inner realities, the second half, presented here, deals with the exterior factors in a person’s spiritual formation. Though a very weighty article, this distillation of van Kaam’s spiritual formation science

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struck me again with awe and surprise at how God moves in all things, inside us and outside of us.

Anne Schank, in her article "Spontaneous Images: Charms for Spiritual Growth" invites us to be willing to receive images which bubble up from the unconscious—sure that these images which arise from within, much like dreams, hold powerful messages that can assist our conscious lives.

Our next article is one I am very excited about, as it is our first article in a language other than English: "Geistliche Führung Im Alten Mönchtum" ("The Desert Fathers and Spiritual Direction"). As we try to grow into our name—and truly being Spiritual Directors *International*—this is a significant step for *Presence* as SDI's official journal. It breaks us out from our smaller English-centric perspective into the larger world of which we are truly one small part, another take on the inner/outer dynamic. I hope it is the first of many non-English features to come. (Don't panic, unilinguals, an English translation is provided.)

Liz Budd Ellmann's fine article on "Tending to Spirituality in the Workplace" further expands our thread by insinuating that the health of one's inner world can affect one's performance, or indeed, the very health of a workplace or an organization.

In "Circle of Hearts: Women's Spirituality Groups," Patricia Brown offers us one important model for forming spiritual discernment circles for women. With a deft understanding of women's inner needs, she presents useful tools for helping one organize and sustain an effective group.

Bonnie Thurston's breathtaking poem "Roots First, Feet First" reveals that sometimes even plants are

more spiritually savvy than we are, and that we can learn a lot simply by watching them—plants as physical sacraments that point to and effect inner grace.

Finally, assistant editor Liz Stout's reflection, "Night Life of the Soul," posits the amusing question of whether there is a difference between the spirituality of Morning People and Night People. How does the light and dark of our outer environment, and our preferences for them, affect our inner world? Read Liz to find out—and to laugh a little, regardless of which camp you find yourself in.

It's not always easy to find the thread of meaning that runs through an issue, but this one revealed itself immediately. While much pietistic or devotional literature forsakes the reality of our outer worlds, spiritual direction is that medium by which the connection between inner and outer is discerned, explored, and celebrated.

In the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus said, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will condemn you." Our inner and outer worlds are not divorced, they are intimately connected. And if, after many years, I actually learn that lesson, I have faith that perhaps someday I will receive my white stone. z

—John R. Mabry

Please note that we are now "officially" publishing in February, June, and October. None of our dead-lines have changed—we have simply changed the cover to reflect when the journal actually hits most mailboxes.