

NEW MONASTICISMS IRELAND

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Welcome to Newsletter No 16

As we move towards the early Spring and the time of Brigid - there is the slight resurgence of light - the days are lengthening - we evoke Brigid's strength.

*The mantle of Brigid about us,
The memory of Brigid within us,
The protection of Brigid keeping us from harm, from ignorance,
from heartlessness. This day and night from dawn till dark. O óiche go hóiche*

From the Prayer of Brigid.

Websites

<http://www.brigidoffaughart.ie>

<http://brigidsway.ie>

A gentle reminder

NMI The Song of the Soul set free - 7th February 2015 St Maelruains

Aramaic Lord's Prayer - 14th February 2015

NMI Celebrating the Centenary of the Birth of Thomas Merton: Monk, Artist and Social Critic with James Finley

23rd June 2015 Milltown Park



Photographs pages 1,2,7 Veronica Ryan 2014 ©

Springtime and the Garden as Places of Spiritual Awakening

(See Senan deSouza's full article on this subject in *Spiritual Capital* edited by B. Flanagan and M. O'Sullivan).

Gardens have long been held to be places of spiritual significance in Islamic, Zen, Christian, and other traditions. In the Bible, for example, there are over 68 references to gardens or gardening (though some refer more to vineyards, farms or orchards). References to gardens range from the Hebrew word *gan* (referring to a vegetable garden in 2 Kg 9:27 and the King's garden in Jer 39:4) to the Greek word





Abbey of the Arts

Abbey of the Arts is a virtual monastery offering an **online retreat for Lent on *The Soul's Slow Ripening: Monastic Wisdom for Discernment* February 16-April 11, 2015**

When you subscribe to our newsletter you also receive access to a free 8-day monk in the world online course. We also offer live gatherings in Galway City to explore contemplative practice rooted in desert, Celtic, and Benedictine traditions, as well as through creative expression.

www.abbeyofthearts.com

For more information please contact Christine at

087 676 5385

Silence in the City

Morning Meditation

The Lantern Centre in 'Ruah'.

Tuesday mornings at 7.30 am

Friday mornings at 7.30 am

paradeisos ("paradise" in English and pardes in Hebrew) P introduced with the Septuagint. References like Lk 23:43 where Jesus promises paradise to the 'good' thief and Rev 2:7 to the tree of life set in God's paradise convey the Judaeo-Islamic elements of a heavenly garden paradise. In Rev 22:1-2 one finds the marriage of the two eschatological images (Garden of Paradise and City of God) with a flourishing garden planted along the main street in the City of God.

Though there are few direct references to gardening, gardens are the setting of various important events in the Bible. Gen 2 provides one account of creation and infers that God is the gardener of that creation; 'God planted a garden in Eden' (v.8) and in v:15 'God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.' The description of Eden casts gardens as a paradise with flowing water, enticing fruit, and rich minerals. The experience for humans of being the caretaker of this delightful and pleasing setting is one of pleasure (the word Eden in Hebrew means "delight" or "pleasure"). Eden is the place where God walked in the cool of the day in close proximity with humans. The garden of Eden image has inspired poets like Dorothy Gurney with these lines; 'One is nearer God's heart in a garden, than anywhere else on earth.' In Gen 3:23 'God expelled humans from the garden' after they fell from grace and perhaps our attempts at gardening can be seen as our longing to re-capture the long



forfeited garden of Eden.

In the Song of Songs the garden is 'enclosed' or 'walled' (4:12) as a setting for the intimacy between the bride and groom, and as a symbol of the bride by those who regard the work as allegorical. Later readings interpret the relationship between the bride and groom with reference to the relationship between God and Israel, and Christ and the Church. In the past Christian writers have used the image of *hortus conclusus* or 'enclosed garden' to teach about Christian devotional living. In several places in the Old Testament the phrase, 'my life is like a watered garden' (Jer 31:12, Is 58:11, Job 8:16), is the metaphor for the life of a person favoured by God.

References to the processes of gardening are found in the New Testament in Lk 13:7ff where the gardener pleads with the owner to spare a barren fig tree for another year so he can dig around it and manure it in a last attempt for it to produce fruit. In some translations of Jn.15:1 Jesus calls God the Father 'the gardener' who cares for the vine, 'prunes the fruitful branches to bear even more' and 'burns' the branches that bear no fruit.(v.2). The parables in Matthew 13 of the sower, the wheat and the darnel and the mustard seed are a few examples that allude to gardening or farming to illustrate aspects of the Kingdom of God. These can resonate with a gardener's experience: for example, the Parable of the Sower (Lk 8:4-8), where the fertility of the soil is a symbol of the gardener's own openness and receptivity to new opportunities in life. Perhaps the closest reference to the process of gardening is found in 1 Corinthians (3:5-9) where Paul's ministry is compared to 'planting', Apollo's to 'watering', but 'God alone makes things grow' and humans are 'God's farm' or garden, where the spiritual seed is sown.

The texts of contemporary urban planning also include discussions of gardens, trees, and parks as necessities for a healthy society. Garden centres, books and programmes by celebrity gardeners have even become part of a profitable global business. Many adult gardeners are encouraged by happy childhood memories of gardening. A visit to a public park has a refreshing effect on most people and developments like the spreading Quiet Garden Movement build on this phenomenon. Gardens are part of our cultural landscape. Today some of the spiritual capital found around gardens can be situated in the religious domain such as the Resurrection Gardens in Nairobi, Kenya or at Mardyke House in Cork city For others the spiritual capital inherent in gardening is of a secular or post-secular type such as Nek Chand's gardens from waste material in Chandigarh, India or Charles Jencks'



Scottish garden that explores the new discoveries of science from DNA to galaxies. A statement which echoes these developments, 'gardening is an active participation in the deepest mysteries of the universe.' is commonly attributed to Thomas Berry. So if gardens are places of spiritual power, what can be said about the practice of gardening that goes into making those gardens?

1 www.quietgarden.co.uk or www.reflectiongardens.org.uk (accessed November 8, 2011).

2 Nek Chand started developing his fantasy rock garden in his 20s; he is now over 80 years of age. He began the garden because he was annoyed at the amount of rubbish

people were throwing away and he decided to use the rubbish to make a garden with all sorts of fantasy figures. It is the second most popular tourist attraction in India after the Taj Mahal. It receives about 5,000 visitors a day.

3 Charles Jencks, *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003).

Inspirational India

We met on the Shatabdi Express. I could hardly not notice the only other foreigner on the train from Kolkata to Siliguri in West Bengal. He was sitting with an Indian companion on the opposite side, 3 seats down from us. I was travelling with my Aunt Ena, a Loreto Sister who has lived and worked in India for over 54 years. We were just settling in for the 600 km journey which takes over 10 hours. Steve came over to say hello and we got chatting.

He was from London, working for Interfaith Matters. I was from Cavan, working for New Monasticisms Ireland. He introduced his friend Madhu from Kolkata, who was working for Economic Rural Development Society (ERDS). They were on their way to visit an ERDS project in Malda, 4 hours from Kolkata. The conversation flowed, it was rich and entertaining.

As chance (or Karma?) would have it, we were all returning to Kolkata on the same train, at the same time, on the same day, one week later. So naturally we arranged to reconnect and continue the stimulating conversations. When Madhu found out I was Irish, he began to expound enthusiastically about an Irish woman who was revered as a saint in India, convinced I must know about her. But I had not yet heard about Sr. Nivedita an inspirational and intrepid lady who devoted her life to Mother India and her people.

I have since learned that Margaret Noble was born in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone in 1867 and died in Darjeeling in 1911. She was an educator, an author and a social activist. While teaching in London she met Swami Vivekananda, an Indian Hindu monk and chief disciple of the 19th-century saint Ramakrishna. (Vivekananda is credited with introducing Hinduism to the West at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was also the founder of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata).

Margaret became inspired by Vivekananda's mission to help the poor of India, especially women, and followed him to India in 1898. She was initiated as a disciple and given the name Nivedita, meaning "Dedicated to God". She established a girls' school in Kolkata and spent the rest of her life in the service of educating women in India. Somehow I found that inspiring.

When we arrived back in Kolkata, we experienced the innate Indian kindness and hospitality, when Madhu proposed that his driver Kamal would drop us home. We accepted gratefully. As we meandered along, I just had to smile at life's synchronicities. What were the chances of travelling in a jeep through the cacophonous chaos that is Kolkata's streets, with a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Jew as my travelling companions. Inspirational India!



Suzanne Kelly - New Monasticisms Ireland Committee

‘The Way of the Prisoner: Breaking the chains of self’

Prisons may be seen and experienced by most as the darkest of places on earth but since I have entered Portlaoise prison and shared in the life of prisoners through meditation I believe that it is in these dark places God is, and that prison can be a way to holiness and healing for all – for people inside and for those who are privileged to sit and pray there.

I have come to recognize the unique value of each person in the group to reveal human suffering and joy that leads to growth and healing. Like the rest of us these people crave peace and quiet to develop greater inner strength and resourcefulness.



We have experienced God’s presence in the silence and solitude as we sit together each week and open our hearts to a higher power. I have been very moved by these encounters and feel that I am drawn to delve deeper into the mystery of God. People have shared on how meditating in the group has helped to make life more bearable inside, and those who have moved out said that they would continue the practice outside.

In the book “The Way of the Prisoner: Breaking the Chains of Self - Through Centering Prayer and Practice: Jens Soering tells us that it was during the time that he discovered Centering Prayer, which he says” helps him deal with the reality of prison life. The meditative technique, he says “helped me survive prison by revealing the purifying and spiritualizing effects of my suffering.”

I believe the call of New Monasticisms Ireland to live more deeply in the mystery of God can be also be found in sharing life with those who are condemned to prisons. “As long as there are people who are trying to realize the divine in themselves, there shall be hope in the world”. Thomas Merton

Barbara Raftery PBVM New Monasticisms Ireland Committee

New Monasticisms Ireland

Book Clubs

Sophia Book Club meets at The Lantern Centre, 17 Synge St. For details contact sophiasociety@gmail.com

Cill Droichid Book Club meets in Celbridge Manor Hotel. For details contact sophiasociety@gmail.com or 086 8369912 Please check in the About page on our website for updates.

INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE to:**Exciting new research on Modern Pilgrimage in Ireland**

There is some really exciting pilgrimage research taking place here in Ireland. One such researcher, Richard Scriven is currently researching for PhD in Modern Pilgrimage with the Geography department at University College Cork. Richard is looking for volunteer to help him with his research by sharing their experiences of pilgrimage at Irish holy wells and other pilgrim sites. The rest of this article has been written by Richard and he explains in his own word about his research and hopefully by the end of the post some of you will be inspired to help out: *Pilgrimage traditions in Ireland are a unique cultural trait. A vast range of devotional activities are performed on mountain tops, on islands, on beaches and at wells, trees and rocks. These practices, that blend folk customs and Christian beliefs, are the modern manifestation of traditions that date back centuries, if not millennia. Even in the context of a general decline in religious observance and increasing secularisation, annually in Ireland, hundreds of thousands of people go on some form of pilgrimage. As well as being deeply spiritual and personal activities, they are also expressions of cultural identity that create rich lived landscapes.*

I am interested in studying this fascinating aspect of Irish social and cultural life. My research looks at pilgrimage in contemporary Ireland by considering how and why it is performed, what it means to the people involved and the ways in which rich spiritual landscapes are forged. As a cultural geographer, I examine the complex relationships that exist between people and place. Geography focuses on how people, through their actions and ideas, shape the world around them and how environments influence and define people. I am interested in the ways in which people and places interact through the performance of pilgrimage. In the performing of devotional practices, it can be seen that people are 'making' holy places and that the locations are, also, defining people as pilgrims.



Photograph Irish Times photo Michael McLaughlin

My research involves two main activities: studying the performances of pilgrimages and talking with people. I visit different pilgrimage sites, especially on the main feast days, and observe and record what is going on. In this way, I can capture a sense of the pilgrimages as they are occurring. Equally important are my conversations with people. These usually take the form of short informal interviews in which we discuss pilgrimages, the practices involved and motivations and experiences. By gaining insight these elements I can present a fuller more human understanding of pilgrimage in contemporary Ireland.

The study is focused on Croagh Patrick, Lough Derg and several holy wells in the South West. Croagh Patrick, or 'the Reek' as it is known, is one of Ireland's foremost holy mountains that attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims annually. The island retreat of Lough Derg has been a spiritual space for centuries and is valued by a great many people who make their yearly pilgrimage there. Ireland has over 3,000 holy wells; while some have fallen into neglect or been lost, many still serve as sites of local devotion and pilgrimage. These places are usually associated with a saint and they are visited on the Pattern Day. I am particularly interested in looking at St Gobnait's Ballyvourney, St Fanahan's Well Mitchelstown, 'The City' Rathmore, St Brigid's Well, Liscannor and Our Lady's Well, Timoleague.

My research is made possible by people volunteering a small amount of their time and sharing stories with me. I am interested in people's own experiences and motivations, rather than collecting factual or historical information. If you have gone on pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick or Lough Derg, or do the 'rounds' at a local holy well, I would be delighted to hear from you.

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(0) 21 490 2709 (during office hours)

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EMAIL: bernadette.purcell@ittdublin.ie for further details



