

## RETURNING

I felt that familiar lump in my throat, and knew that I'd have to swallow it fast if I was going to avoid crying. My friend Donna was entering holy orders, and it was almost more than I could take in, in the moment. After the bishop removed his hands from her head, he called all the clergy to do the same. As I did so, I had visions of my own ordination many years ago. The flood of memories, both of my own fledgling ministry and of my friendship with Donna, almost brought my composure to collapse once again.

In the years we have known each other I have delighted in watching Donna grow, even as I shared my own growth with her. We trained together as spiritual directors, and ever since ours has been a relationship of mutual direction, hare-brained entrepreneurism, and sushi at sunset. Now she's trying to get me into golf. We'll see.

Part of what makes our relationship so unique is that our paths are very similar. We both grew up in the same highly conservative evangelical denomination, and because of the wounds we received there we both left the practice of Christianity.

We are also both possessed of a keen mystical sensitivity, which has led us through myriad spiritual paths. After many years, this sensitivity eventually brought us back to the church. For each of us, it was the mysticism and freedom we found in the liturgical traditions which brought us back home.

There we found beauty, license to question, an openness to other traditions, and an acceptance of the outcast—including us—which mirrored Jesus' own ministry. The prodigals had returned, but it was a very different place to which we had come. I beamed at Donna as she brought the bread and wine to the altar, preparing the elements for our common meal.

The *Tao Te Ching* asserts that, "Returning is the move-

ment of the Tao." It is the business of the Spirit to lead us back to the point of conflict, to reconcile the estranged, to redeem the time. We may return to say goodbye, to heal a wound, to make peace, to gain closure on unfinished business, or even to make a new beginning. It is almost never a gentle journey, but it is usually healing.

We also return because we have more to learn. When one is dealing with spirituality, there is always more to learn. The spiritual life is a bottomless well of nourishment and insight. The further you go into that super-essential darkness, the further you find there *is* to go.

For this very reason we do not assume that any one article in *Presence* contains the last word on any particular subject. Just as Philip St. Romain's article in our last issue returned to the topic of online spiritual direction originally addressed in "Spiritual Direction in Cyberspace" by Jeanne Estella and Andre Heuer (Vol. 3.2), it contained no redundant information. Instead it enlarged our understanding. We are always eager to revisit a topic in *Presence*, because we know we always have more to learn.

This issue of *Presence* is unique in that nearly every article in it revisits a topic we have seen before. Like Phil's article, though, each one brings new gifts to the table.

In "Brief Encounters: What Spiritual Direction can Learn from the Short-term Therapy Model," Duane Bidwell revisits the often contentious topic of the relationship between psychotherapy and spiritual direction. This subject was treated in "Psychological Competence for Spiritual Directors: An Interview" by Graham Lindegger and Susan Rakoczy, IHM (Vol. 3.2, p. 20.), and has also been touched on peripherally several times. Bidwell focuses on what we can learn from our sister profession, and in doing so opens a door to dialogue.

In “Friends of God and Prophets,” Mary Ann Scofield, RSM picks up the theme begun by James Keegan, SJ in “To Bring All Things Together: Spiritual Direction as Action for Justice” in our very first issue. In it Mary Ann reminds us that the Spirit who transforms us also seeks to transform the world, and that, as spiritual directors, we are called to be on the front line of this movement.

“The Spiritual Elder” by John Chryssavgis is the first article we have seen on spiritual direction in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, but as this tradition is contiguous and built upon the ministry of the desert fathers and mothers, it expands substantially on the wisdom imparted by Regina Bäumer and Michael Plattig in their excellent “The Desert Fathers and Spiritual Direction (Geistliche Führung Im Alten Mönchtum)” (7.2).

Likewise, “Spiritual Direction for Youthful Seekers” expands our understanding of Generation X, following on the heels of my own article “The Gnostic Generation: Understanding and Ministering to Generation X” (5.2). In this new article, Pat Hendricks draws on extensive interviews and many years of expe-

rience with Xers to reveal the spiritual aspirations and cultural complexities of this much-misunderstood generation.

In “The Long Road Home,” Terri Mifek invites us to listen to scripture as she relives with us the tragic events of September 11. She does so in a uniquely personal manner which reminds us that all of our losses, whether individual or collective, are also invitations to faith and hope.

Our lead article in this issue, “The Spirituality of the Spiritual Director,” reminds us, as so many other articles in the past have done, that we cannot guide people in the Spirit unless our own spirituality is verdant and bearing fruit. We must tend to our own gardens first.

As I watched Donna, resplendent in her alb and a brand new stole, I marvelled on the power of returning: returning to a faith we had long since abandoned, returning to the memories of my own ordination, returning to the places we thought we knew so well; returning because we must, because they still have so much to teach us. ■

—John R. Mabry

### About the Cover

Our cover this year completes the cycle of four “language” covers we have featured for the past several years. Beginning with Greek in volume 5, Hebrew in volume 6, and Arabic in volume 7, our languages were derived from the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, respectively. Volume 8 employs the sacred language of Chinese, representing the East, and the many non-Abrahamic religions which many of our members and directees follow.

Titled “In the Beginning was the Tao,” our cover is an original collage from Chinese sources by editor John R. Mabry. The title refers to the prologue of St. John’s Gospel, in which the Greek

word *logos* is most often rendered *tao* when translated into Chinese.

Cascading down the left-hand column is chapter 51 of the *Tao Te Ching*, the principle scripture of Taoism, which states, “The Tao is the source of all things. . . .” In the center is the character for “tao” inside a brush-painted circle. The circle represents creation, unfinished and imperfect, yet beautiful and simple. In many Eastern artistic traditions, artists “sign” their work with a woodcut stamp, often a Chinese character. In this collage, the signature on creation is that of the Creator, the Word, the Tao, the “source of all things.” ■