

North American Newsletter

Volume 24, No. 2, Advent, 2016

The Two Marys



In the Gospels we have two descriptions of the Mother of God. The feeling-tone of each is different. In Luke, she is the one to whom the angelic messenger announces the coming of God's Son through the inseminating power of the Holy Spirit. She is humble and open, experiencing an other-worldly event.

The Mother in Matthew's Gospel receives royal gifts. She must flee to Egypt to save her little Son from Herod's persecution. In John's Gospel she stands under the cross. Mother's innocence has become bitter experience, but she also partakes in her Son's subsequent rise from death.

At this time of the year we can picture the otherworldly Mother. If we could see her now, in

winter, we would see the moon element spread out below the earth's surface. From her human form, we see a heavenly Earth-Star, raying out into the cosmos from her head. At her breast the sun's rays, forming itself out of the clouds, condensing into the Child, all in a rainbow-hued background. She is the woman formed out of the clouds, endowed with earthly forces under her feet, sun radiance in the middle, head crowned without stars—the woman of Rev. 12. She is arising out of the cosmos itself. In winter, when we ourselves are most strongly connected with the earth, we see the Mother arising in the cosmos, in the interplay between the earth and the stars.

At the opposite time of the year (and in the opposite hemisphere now) another Mother can be seen. A sparkling silver blue rises from the depths of earth, bound up with human weakness and error. It gathers into the picture of Earth Mother in the depths. She is Mater, materie. Above her is the flowing golden-red creative form of Uriel and the Spirit dove, the Spirit Father. Between them, between Spirit Father and Earth Mother, we behold the Son. In the summer we breathe ourselves out into the cosmos; but we strongly perceive the Father above and the Mother below. We are made aware of human error.

Painting by Bernhard Eyb

As we move through the course of the year, we ourselves move between these two counter-poles —cosmic mother, earth mother. During the twelve days and holy nights of the Christmas season, from Christmas to Epiphany, we experience this polar movement in miniature, in the picture of the two Marys. The Christ, the Child reconciles these two poles. In Luke the Child is born in a cave in the earth, in midwinter (not in summer). Although he is in a cave in the earth, he and his mother are innocent and humble. We read his gospel story from the altar early Christmas morning.

On January 6, we read of the Matthew Mother in her regal queenly aspect. She receives royal gifts, moves forward through experience, grappling with Herod's evil, fleeing to Egypt where the mysteries of death were understood.

In this movement between these two poles, the two mothers represent the overall movement of the human experience. It is a movement from humble innocence to earthly experience, being crowned with the earth-star and at the same time finding and maintaining (again) a connection to the starry cosmos.

Mary represents the human soul, operating between the two poles and moving through them over and over again in the course of the years. She also represents a kind of aggregate of all human souls, a spiritual entity we could call the Soul of Man, as it evolves over time. From humble innocence we are born out of the summer of stars, generated by the union of Sky Father and Earth Mother. Gradually, the Soul of Man is evolving toward becoming a being radiant with experience, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, crowned with the stars of earth winter.

Rev. Cynthia Hindes

An Advent Thought

Last year, at 91, one of the great ones of the game of baseball, Yogi Berra, died. He was known as a man with a unique wisdom, expressed in unusual sayings: "When you come to a fork in the road — take it." A few days before his death his wife asked him, "Yogi, where do you want to be buried? At home in the family plot in St. Louis or here in New York City?" Yogi replied, "Oh, I don't know. Surprise me!"

We enter Advent 2016 in surprising times. One might say, in radically uncertain times, where the unknown future seems filled with some pretty terrifying possibilities. Lucifer will try to lure us into closing our eyes and phantasizing His Reality Show. Satan will sound the alarm and have us lock the door and hide in fear.

What might Christ be saying softly, but clearly in the center of our hearts?

"Keep your eyes open. Don't lock the door.

Go out and look up and around and listen well.

Go in and sit still and center deep.

Get ready — I may come in radically new, original, surprising ways."

Let's return the favor. Let's surprise Him.

Rev. Richard Dancey

The Christian Community of North America Delegates' Meeting Nov. 3-5, 2016 in Chicago

It's always an exciting moment just before a major event: as preparer we wondered who will be the first to arrive, what stories they will have to tell, how the many participants will ultimately mix and match and build a temporary community, in this case representing the whole of the North American Christian Community. Yes, it's November, time for the Delegates' Meeting, graciously hosted by our community in Chicago. Delegates and other interested folks came from all our communities; one got stranded on the road but was there in spirit. On Thursday afternoon the treasurers of all our communities met under the leadership of the Regional Board Treasurer, Richard Meyers.

This year the Regional Board prepared the content: *Circles of Life – Enlivening our Communities, Maintaining Vitality* was the theme. The speakers approached this topic from three different directions. Rev. Michael Brewer (Detroit) spoke of the enthusiasm which accompanied the beginnings of the Chicago community in the early Fifties and traced a course from the “instinctive enthusiasm” of pioneer work to the “cultivated enthusiasm” which we need to maintain our momentum. On Friday, Bruce Chamberlin (Washington DC/Regional Board) stressed the importance of timely and thorough communication as a bearer of ongoing vitality in a congregation, especially one that has, like the DC community, already grown out of its pioneer phase. On Saturday morning Kate Kristensen (San Francisco/Regional Board) showed us with the help of her own faith journey how an individual connects his or her own vitality with the vitality of a community already existing. Rev. Ann Burfeind then traced the growing vitality of the community gathered around the altar by leading us through the four stages of the Act of Consecration.

A high point of every Delegates' Meeting is the sharing of the community reports. The representatives spoke in order from youngest to oldest. Here are some fragments: “Get participation as far out in the community as possible;” “Six weeks of summer camp for kindergarten-age children;” “Times when vitality flows, and times when it ebbs;” “Small congregation of dedicated, long-time members;” “Newcomers are greeted warmly;” “Plays that we do in the community and other churches, caroling in the wider community;” “A piece of property in escrow — challenges have been feasibility studies and county approval to put a church there;” “Celebrated 25 years of our present home, we went out singing in our neighborhood;” “Feels like an extended family;” “Craft group every Tuesday that brings other people into the church;” “Once a month a pizza lunch where youth make pizza for everyone after the service;” “In the last few years we have had many more baptisms than funerals. Last year, no funerals.”

In 2017, the Delegates' Meeting will have existed for twenty years. How will the meeting look? How can we renew the format, enlivening our whole North American Community and maintaining its vitality?

Join us in Denver from November 9 through 11, 2017!

Rev. Craig Wiggins, San Francisco/Regional Board

Candles at Christmas: The Mystery of Sacrifice

For centuries candles have been used to help celebrate Advent and Christmas. Even in the present day, many people still feel the need for candlelight at this time of year, even though electric lights have eliminated the practical necessity for candles. Through observing what happens when candles are lit, we can come to understand why they belong so essentially to the mysteries of Christmas and Christianity.

When a candle is lit, a flame is brought closer and closer until it melts the wax and ignites the wick. Once lit, it can continue burning by melting its wax with the warmth of its own flame. The melted wax flows up the wick and sacrifices itself, so to speak, in the flame. Then one of the great mysteries of earthly chemistry takes place: the solid wax that has already become liquid is now transformed into warmth and light that shines out into the world. Such a lighted candle can further be used to ignite other candles without its own intensity being in the least diminished; to do so, in fact, serves to increase the amount of light in the world.

Long ago, before history began, physical fire and light were given to the earth for the first time and began to warm human bodies and illuminate their surroundings. But this external fire could do nothing to alleviate the growing cold in human hearts, the growing darkness in human minds. And so a divine fire, a spiritual light, was sent to the earth to warm our human hearts and illuminate our minds. Brought to the earth by the Christ, this spiritual fire shone into earth existence for the first time in Jesus of Nazareth. He was the bearer of a new kind of light, of a new power of transformation on earth. For when Christ's light is born into our souls, it slowly begins to melt the substance of our earthly nature, transforming it with the creative fire of his presence into light that shines out into the world through human thoughts and actions.



Furthermore, just as the presence of one candle can enkindle another, so also can the presence of one human being, whose heart has felt the fire of Christ's love, radiate warmth and enthuse others with the joy of Christ's message; the message of a new kind of light, a spiritual transforming light. It is Christ's light, which, by working the mysteries of "heavenly chemistry," can illuminate every situation in human life, even those which may appear most dark and hopeless. For this reason, hope rises within us anew every year at Christmas time as we sense the approach of Christ's light into our daylight. Candles alone cannot give us this spiritual light. But every time we light them in these dark winter days, they can serve as a reminder of the divine light that seeks to be born into our soul, of the divine light that revealed itself through Christ, who appeared in the realm of earth in Jesus of Nazareth and said to mankind: "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Rev. James Hindes

Cordoba 2016: “Take Heart!”

Although The Christian Community is a world movement, this quality is usually not visible in a local congregation. Here we meet more or less familiar people, in a more or less local atmosphere.

Imagine what happens when people from different congregations, countries or even continents meet and share their experiences with The Christian Community. This is what happened this year from July 23rd to 31st in Cordoba, Argentina. Although the North-South conference, usually held once in four years, is most of all a meeting point between people and congregations of The Christian Community in North and South America, this year only 11 out of 170 participants came from North America. Apart from a few guests from Germany and the Netherlands, all of the other people who attended came from countries in South America. They brought a remarkable warmth and enthusiasm in the cold season of southern mid-winter. Yes; it was cold: we gathered in a Franciscan residence, which had something of a Spartan quality with rooms without heating, small beds, and a giant hall in which a tent, for our meetings, was set up. We stayed more or less warm with coats, shawls and hats.

As a counter balance for these small inconveniences there was the heartiness of the spicy South American temperament. For me as a newcomer in South America, it was amazing to see the youthful enthusiasm and warm gratitude that surrounded the whole conference. This element was even more strongly present through the contributions of 28 young people from different congregations in South American. They enlivened the atmosphere through special games that helped to connect the participants – even if they could not understand each other’s language. Another amazing quality is the self-evidence with which people in South American speak about the spiritual world. In one of their meetings, the youth group had a three-hour conversation about experiences with angels. Each of the young people could share openly what they had experienced in this realm.

During the entire week, I worked with 40 people on the theme: “Building bridges between nature and Christianity.” In this workshop many participants brought their experiences with “the little people,” the elemental beings — nothing unusual in a continent where people have still (or again?) strong connections with the spiritual world and with religion.

During the evenings, the platform was free for contributions of several congregations. There were interesting local and national traditions (like an evening Brazilian carnival with a comedy and dances!); one could also experience the pioneer atmosphere of several of the congregations. In Patagonia, for



Photo: The Youth Group Meets

example, the young congregation of Plottier is literally building up a church from the ground. At the moment, there are only the concrete foundations where a church is to arise in the future. The congregation meets – if the weather allows it – in a tent for the Act of Consecration of Man and the other rituals.

The main theme of the conference: “Confiad!” (Take Heart!) connected us not just with each other but also with the whole world. “In the world you have fear – but take heart, I have overcome the world!” (John 16:33) Countries like Columbia have a long history of violence. The only law that seems to rule the country is the rule of revenge. Try to imagine for a moment what terrible stories must stand behind the following figures and numbers that were presented in one of the lectures. Between 1958 and 2012:

27,000 people kidnapped

1,982 massacres

25,000 people disappeared

16,340 selected assassinations

5,712,506 displaced persons (“desplazados”)

In this long history of terror, there are nevertheless impressive individual examples of forgiveness and courage. A mother whose child was murdered in the most brutal way, tried to come on speaking terms with offenders and victims, telling them: “I see the face of my child in all human beings.” Apart from encouraging human examples, we deepened our understanding and perception of the One, who can say: “I have overcome the world.” The following words of Emil Bock, written in times of crises and despair, read each day before the morning lectures, became alive and present through their connection with the actual presentations. They will accompany the lives of many of the participants, as a guide for the future: “In a humanity scourged by anguished dreams which asks itself: How much more is to come? we want to be a silent group, which knows what is coming, because we know Who is coming. And with His Coming may come whatever has to come.”

Rev. Bastiaan Baan



Inspired by Luke 21 — “The Little Apocalypse”



Remembering What is Real...

The last couple of days here in Toronto the winds were blowing — the trees bending, the leaves swirling. And since election day, soul winds are swirling across the globe. Storms of fear, anxiety and hate... gusts of anger, shock and uncertainty.... these soul winds are bending our human branches, challenging our roots... calling on our soul roots to dig deep.

This is because every human being, like the trees, has roots, inner roots. And these inner roots keep us steady when storms come. Like the trees, our inner roots are nourished, not by the winds and storms of fear and hate — we are nourished by the substance and being of the Ground of the World. Human souls are strengthened, not by swaying this way and that with the endless debate — human souls are strengthened by roots that push down into the Father Ground.

Dear friends, let us remember, in this time of soul storms and turmoil, that Christ did not come into the world to support a particular political party or a particular country. Let us remember that the real world is not what we see in politics or media. Let us remember that our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual adversaries that seek to fill our hearts with fear and hate. Let us remember that our task is not to fix the world, but to bring love into a broken world. Let us remember that the divine call is still the same as it was before the election — not to eradicate and destroy evil, but in the destructive darkness to find light. Let us remember that Christ walks with all human souls no matter how corrupt, hoping to root us in the Father Ground of the World.

May our roots dig deep into what is real. May our roots dig deep into Christ, the substance of love. So that the storms which are raging not uproot our souls.

Rev. Jonah Evans

A Time to Prepare...

It is impossible to avoid noticing all of the decorations which have sprung up all around us, beginning more or less at the time of Halloween. The decorations of course are for Christmas, and they emphasize one particular aspect of Christmas. The decorations proliferate to a culmination at Christmas: and as soon as Christmas is over, most of them disappear.

And so what we are seeing can lead us to the thought: These decorations belong essentially to the Advent season. They are not so much about Christmas as the preparation for Christmas — in other words, Advent. Advent is the season of preparation, and the outer preparations encouraged through the decorations do indeed have their place.

Of course, there are other preparations which are more fundamental than those emphasized in the outer world. As we may know in many other situations, who we are is the ultimate basis for what

Photo Credit: Upcoming Storm Clouds by Gary Dee, Wiki Commons

we are doing. Probably even in the most crass of those calls for us to buy this or that for someone, or to decorate our house in such and such a way, is the awareness that we need to prepare for something special. And perhaps the outer decorations can be a reflection of the preparation of our true being.

For all that is approaching us can be seen in the signs around us, in the turmoil and in all that floods over us in great waves. But in the realm of the clouds, where all the words we speak continue to echo and create forms, is the Son of Man, to whom each one of us will at last give birth. This is what we are truly preparing for.

Rev. Michael Brewer

News from the Seminary

Nine students are studying at the Seminary in North America this semester. With a tenth student from Australia joining us in January (their summer), we will have five seminarians in each of the first two years of study. In addition to the harmonious intensive study of the students, the seminary receives guests each semester, who arrive from all points of the compass to join our Open Courses. Many guests develop a deep connection with the Seminary to become regular Open Course participants - or even seminarians!

One year ago, Patrick Kennedy arrived in the Spring Valley congregation from the Washington DC congregation and began taking up the role of a Seminary Director, part-time, at first. This fall, at The Christian Community Annual Delegates Meeting, Lenker Oliver Steinrueck announced that the Circle of Seven appointed two priests, Julia Polter (Boston congregation) and Jonah Evans (Toronto congregation), to work together with Patrick in the coming years to develop a kind of strategic plan for the future of the seminary, encouraging them to create something totally unique in the landscape and history of the priest training in our movement. These three will carry the leadership for the planning and development for the future.

During this development period, Bastiaan Baan will continue his work at the Seminary as a Director until the new plan is ready to be implemented. Bastiaan was sent to North America for a period of five years, until November 2017. This period will be extended a few more years so that the transition towards new forms for the priest training can take their time to ripen and unfold.

The Seminary is especially looking forward to participating in the international conference of The Christian Community in Holland, traveling with its students at the end of May. Experiencing the spirit of the whole movement for religious renewal is an essential part of what the training should facilitate and attending an event that lets the world-wide character of The Christian Community come to expression can be a strong way to encounter it.

To learn more about what all is happening at the Seminary these days, look for the Seminary Fall Newsletter at the beginning of December and on the Seminary's web site www.christiancommunityseminary.org.

Camp Tamarack

Dear Friends,

For the first time since 2009 we could carry out a summer camp under the auspices of The Christian Community at Camp Tamarack in the High Sierras, between Huntington Lake and Shaver Lake. With twenty-seven children between the ages of seven and fourteen and a volunteer staff we breathed fresh mountain air, sang, played, listened to stories, did handicrafts, explored the surrounding area and formed a spirit-filled community for fourteen days of rhythmic life without screens and all the other usual distractions of contemporary life.

With a gift from the East Coast Camp and a donation from the Los Angeles Community for scholarships, we started out a year ago making plans, securing the campsite and getting the word out. Since the camp had not run for seven years, it was very much like starting all over again. Thanks to the help of several parents and campers, word of mouth did as excellent a job as did our website, folders, postcards and even a radio announcement. All in all we felt things went well, organizationally and as far as satisfied campers & parents. As far as we could tell at the end of the camp, everyone wanted to return next year and bring friends & siblings along.

Looking at the results of the camp financially, we are running a slight deficit. This is not surprising, considering the many startup costs we encountered, the unfamiliar terrain of marketing & publicity as well as granting more scholarships than originally planned. The upshot of all this is: we need some funds to get Camp Tamarack 2017 up and running.

How can you help? Become a Friend of Camp Tamarack!

- A financial donation of any amount is most welcome. Checks payable to The Christian Community may be sent to 906 Divisadero St., San Francisco, CA 94115 with the Memo: Tamarack 2017. Gifts are tax deductible. You may also use PayPal on our website.
- Help spread the word: talking to friends & family about the camp, securing a stand at a school event where we could offer publicity material, preferably accompanied by smiling former & future campers. Any of the directors would be willing to come to a school and give a presentation about the camp. Our website: www.camptamccsummercamp.com.
- Contact one of the camp directors with idea & suggestions.
Bettina Eipper (707) 668-1601 camptamccsummercamp@gmail.co
Craig Wiggins (484) 557-8086 craig@wiggins.nl
Hans Walser (650) 995-3414 hanswdeuce@yahoo.com

We will be meeting soon to start making plans for the next Camp in 2017. We are planning to secure the same campsite as this year. The dates haven't been set yet, but we want to set the camp as early as possible in the summer vacation, similar to the practice in the recent past: the last week of June & the first week of July.

We look forward to hearing from you and putting our shoulders under the wonderful project "Christian Community Summer Camp 2017."

With warmest regards,

Bettina Eipper

Hans Walser

Rev. Craig Wiggins

Christian Community Children's Camp Moves to Maine and retains its Magic

The Christian Community Camp on the East Coast is in its 45th year. Last summer we made the daring step to move up to the beautiful state of Maine.

The U-Haul left DC on a hot Sunday afternoon, went to Pennsylvania to pick up the load of costumes, kitchenware, medical supplies, crafts, books, water gear, sports gear and wall-hangings which help to create the camp we love. This was a long haul, about 12 hours, but Michael Judge made it to Maine in time for us to set-up before the children arrived.



What else had to happen before the children arrived? This was the Maine mystery! There were no tents up when we got there! In fact, the Army Corps of Engineers were doing construction, right in the middle of our campgrounds! We were stunned! We tried to work around them. We sang, we set up the kitchen and the dining room, we negotiated. But they were not leaving! Meanwhile the bell was missing! Where had we left it? In Spring Valley in the basement of the church! We can't have camp without the BELL!!! That's impossible. The bus to the rescue! The big, heavy, iron bell was loaded on to the bus. We were saved. But wait! The children were coming and the tents still weren't up and the army was still heavily and noisily in our midst!!! What to do?



I nearly gave up. There was only one hope left: The Angels! I was praying around the clock!

We made a roadblock and kept the parents at bay while we spoke politely to our military friends to beg them to please clear the way for our children's arrival. Finally they did! Whew!

Once the children were there, and the tents, at the very last minute, went up, we began with all the best will and cheerfulness in the world, to carry on with camp. And a miracle happened: IT WAS CAMP! It was as if the construction became part of the landscape like mosquitoes, and not even as annoying! We sang and they heard us. We greeted them politely and they smiled as our children passed by. We created our camp and the “magic” of it was there. I thought: “This is the Being of Camp. This is what it means to be carried by a Spiritual Being.” And I gave thanks. And we sang our hearts out.

We will return to Camp Bomazeen in Maine next summer.

In gratitude for this extraordinary experience,

Rev. Carol Kelly
Camp Director

**Printed in the Washington Post, Nov. 9, 2016, in Response to the Pope's
Statement: "Ban on female priests may last forever."**

I am a priest in The Christian Community, a movement for religious renewal that picked up where the Catholic church left off nearly a hundred years ago. In our worldwide congregations, women are ordained equally with men and we celebrate the seven sacraments, which have been returned to their spiritual depths.

The Pope referred to an earlier letter by John Paul II who noted that “Jesus only chose men as his apostles.” This does not take into account that it would have been culturally impossible for the women who understood, often more deeply than the men, the message of Christ, to be in the company of and travel with the apostles. It should be noted that the male disciples, with the exception of John, fled from the cross on Good Friday and it was the women who stayed to bear witness. And it was to women that The Risen One first appeared on Easter morning.

If we are to evolve in our Christian/Spiritual understanding, we shall have to go deeper than we are accustomed to going. Insight and inspiration belong to every human being.

Rev. Carol T. Kelly

In the Beginning

Theresa Melia

in the beginning was the Word
and the Word spoke Saturn warmth
around spirit seeds and the seeds quickened

the Word breathed Sun air
around spirit seeds and we grew into becoming

Word bathed us in Moon water
and we stretched and swam into life

the Word moulded us with a layer of clay
over stony bones and we stood up against gravity

the Word was God
and the Word was with God

we spoken spirit children beheld the glory
through new eyes flooded with Light
we spoken spirit children heard the songs
of angels all around
felt under new feet the pulsing living planet
and we knew the oneness of creation
marveled at our brothers birds fleet footed deer
our sisters dolphins humming bees
living as one in the interwoven
web of creation
we spoken spirit children of stardust moulded
began to walk on our way

and the Word spoke
“It is good, but will my wingless child
fly back to me?”
“Will my furless child seek the warmth
of my breath?”
“Will my child deafened by earth ears
long to hear my voice?”

And the Word became silent
and oh so invisibly watched
as we walked away
as we walked away on feet formed
of stardust coalescing in the Word steam
of the Creator

alone we felt in the dark cave
of a body
alone in the thick cage of matter

blind and deaf cold and confused
with urges rising we gleaming sweat
worked our way into stone houses

grass huts water gourds
soft babies strapped to our backs
stone knife points

we within padded matter
on silent nights
stare at the pulsing stars
we lean toward the flowing mastery
of water
by day we soak in the life
of the light of the Sun
we rest on the lap of the earth
and begin in freedom to arch
our wingless backs

to reach our furless hands
to cup our yearning ears
to hear beyond this seeming silence



Painting: The Immaculate Conception by Carlo Crivelli, 1492
Wiki Commons

Movement in our Movement

Rev. Rafal Nowak was warmly welcomed this summer when he arrived in the Sacramento congregation from his previous community in Darmstadt, Germany. He joins Rev. Sanford Miller in the work there.

Rev. Cindy Hindes, who has served in the Los Angeles congregation for 19 years, will be entering retirement this summer. Cindy will be moving to Kimberton Hills, PA and will be able to help out in the nearby Devon community and other communities on the East Coast, as needed.

From the Christian Community Bookshelf

The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz* *Bastiaan Baan

The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz is one of the most important writings of esoteric Christianity, first published in 1616. Bastiaan Baan's interpretation and commentary makes this work accessible to readers of today, and concludes that the content is as valuable today as when it was first offered to humanity.

Floris Books | 256 pages | Paperback | \$24.95

Available at www.Steinerbooks.com or local congregational book tables.

In Search of Truth in Our Virtual World

A Talk by Rev. Nora Minassian —

Given at the “Take Heart!” Conference in Cordoba, Argentina

Introduction:

This is my first time in South America. I want to share two precious experiences I had of South Americans about 6 years ago in Germany when The Christian Community had the World Congress in Dortmund. The first: I heard what it has taken for one person to come from here to the Congress there. This person had decided to bike to work instead of taking the bus for about two years in order to save money to come to that conference. I could tell how deep the love of South Americans is to The Christian Community. The second experience was that on the first day of the Congress, several different small groups of people independently of each other were coming to me and talking to me in Spanish. This has already happened here in these days but it was unusual that it happened in Germany. South Americans thought, or rather were completely convinced that I speak Spanish even though I have never spoken Spanish in my life. But they spoke to me with complete faith. These people had tremendous faith in me so much so that it planted a seed in me to learn Spanish. What else could we ask for? Love for the community and faith in the other can bring much change in our world today.

Worlds come with different languages. We go into different worlds and come out of them through the help of a language. It is indeed wonderful that we experience different languages in this conference. Yes, at times we may not completely understand and at times it slows us down. Yet, going through the struggle to understand and knowing that there is always more that we still haven't understood keeps us more honest and humble, attentive and open to continuously attempt to better understand. Just like the other languages, there is also the language of truth. How do we learn this language? How do we hear, speak and understand the language of truth?

“In search of Truth in our virtual world” is the theme of this talk. I was sharing this theme with one of our members, which I was given because another colleague was going to give this talk but was not able to come to this conference. When I said “In search of Truth” to this member, her eyes lit up and when I finished the sentence with “in our virtual world”, her facial expression completely changed to the opposite. Where did the light go when speaking of the virtual world? Is there truth in the virtual world that we can search for?

Then and Now:

Searching for truth was not always part of human life. Just like when we were children, there was a time in human evolution when we were living in and by the truth, with complete trust. This is also the case while we grow up. From childhood to adulthood we are gradually left to ourselves. We grow from complete trust and simplicity into doubt and complex questions. From questions such as “Why is the sky blue?” or “Where was I before I was born?” to “Why am I here?” “What is my task in life?”

Yesterday, we heard a beautiful example from Rodrigo about how important it is to have such trust, such confidence as a child and how this confidence can transform into confidence in people later on.

As we awaken to the visible world, we grow asleep to the invisible world. The realm from which we came and in which we trusted as children is lost to us as we incarnate further in the earth. We have also gone through this phenomenon as humanity as we became more connected to the physical world.

There was a time where humanity experienced the true nature of the human being formed out of spirit, soul and body. This way of identifying changed over time even in the realm of religion, the realm that is to connect us to the spirit. Seeing the human being as spirit, soul and body changed during the Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in A.D. 869. Man was perceived as body and soul only.¹

Later, the soul was also lost to humanity when only the body, the physical body, was considered reality.²

Reality versus Maya:

With the loss of spirit and soul, the physical was separated from the spiritual, from the Divine creator and from the reality of Divine thoughts.³

With the loss of the spirit and the soul, man was left only with the physical body as reality, as truth. What is reality became Maya. What is Maya became reality.

There is another layer in this evolution. This is the change of group consciousness to individual consciousness. Authority coming to us from outside changed gradually to individual consciousness and individual authority. With the change of consciousness, our relationship to God has changed. The God of nation, of group or folk changed to the individual God, personal God, and even to the loss of God, to the death of God⁴. In the past, human beings experienced the divine in nature and in the world around them. Today, we have lost the divine in nature. A mood of reverence and gratitude towards nature has changed to feelings of entitlement and ownership of nature, to use and abuse of the resources of the earth, we buy and sell water, we kill each other for oil, we pile mountains of trash.

Religions have lost their strength to connect, to re-connect the human being to the realm of the spirit from where we originate. However, humanity did not stop. The searching did not and does not stop here. The feeling of the loss continues. We suffer from a certain homesickness. Seeking, and longing for the world of spirit, for the lost heavenly realm, to connect with the divine and find true home again.

¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships: Esoteric Studies* - Volume IV, Karmic Relationships, Volume IV: Lecture III, Lecture: 10th September, 1924, Dornach, GA0238

² Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of Soul and Spirit*, 24th October, 1907, Berlin, GA056

³ Rudolf Steiner, *Realism and Nominalism*, 27th January, 1923, Dornach, GA0220

⁴ (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)

What is truth?

In this time of feeling lost, there is an important moment in human evolution. When Christ is arrested, there is a man who asks the question, “What is Truth?” In John 18:38, Pontius Pilate reasons with Christ. He attempts to release Him, not being able to find fault in Him. In verse 37, we read: “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are you a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.’” Then in verse 38 we read: “Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’”

This question, that Pilate asks is not only a question coming to us from the past but also from the future. We continue to ask this question. For rarely in life, do we find the strength to say we know it. We sense it at times, we feel it, we grasp it and we lose it again.

Today, when we seek for truth in any realm in life, we see that truth suffers. To follow the news is one example. When we just follow the news of what is going on in Syria, depending on which news we read, even just what we read in the headlines, we read opposite and opposing news. The contemporary media has become such that we ought to develop a certain perception of discernment in order to follow. For example, when we look at what is dominating the headlines and why, we ought to find the patterns in the language of the media and ask: For whose interest is this news and what is it trying to create in peoples’ mind and soul? How much fear is it perpetrating? How much of it is a lie? Who decides the headlines? Today, truth suffers. With the truth, humanity suffers.

Where are we now?

With the loss of spirit and soul, we are left with the reality that only contains the physical world. That which was reality has become Maya and that which is Maya has become reality. We are now living in the Maya that we call reality. Now, we can come back to our theme and ask: What is virtual reality?

In Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, the virtual world, also called massively multiplayer online world or MMOW, is defined as “a computer-based simulated environment populated by many users who can create a personal avatar, and simultaneously and independently explore the virtual world, participate in its activities and communicate with others.”

In another words, virtual is what does not exist but appears to exist. In this definition, the actual meaning of virtual is lost. According to an online etymology dictionary, virtual means “influencing by physical virtues or capabilities, effective with respect to inherent natural qualities,” from Medieval Latin *virtualis*, from Latin *virtus* “excellence, potency, efficacy,” literally “manliness, manhood” (virtue.) The virtue in the virtual world is lost. We experience such loss in the world of words frequently. Words go through transformation and lose the spirit in them. We are to find the truth in words and resurrect them again.

The word avatar originally comes from Hindu Mythology, the descent of a deity to the earth in an incarnate form or some manifest shape; the incarnation of a god, an embodiment or personification as of a principle attitude, view of life. In the world of technology, an avatar is a graphical image that represents a person on the Internet.

In technology, the virtual world has taken over. There is virtual everything – virtual memory, virtual stores, virtual tours, virtual classroom, virtual sites, virtual campuses, virtual reality, virtual world and even a second life, in this virtual world.

One example of life in a virtual world is Pokémon Go. According to Wikipedia, Pokémon Go is “a free-to-play location-based augmented reality mobile game. The game allows players to capture, battle, and train virtual creatures, called Pokémon, who appear on device screens as though in the real world.” An application for smart phones, Pokémon Go was released on July 6 and by July 20, more than 30 million users worldwide downloaded it. It is mixing the virtual world with something of a reality, or increased, or augmented reality, or augmented virtual reality. Doctors first recommended it believing that it encourages exercise and movement, since the player has to go out and find these pocket monsters, Pokémons, in the physical environment around them guided by the GPS on their smart phone. This was questionable, however, after the first weeks, because there were many accidents reported.

Here are a few examples of the outcomes of this game. On July 21, the world’s largest Pokémon Go gathering took place in San Francisco organized by a Facebook event page. Nine thousand people gathered to play.

On July 23, two teenagers illegally crossed the Canada-US border without knowing that they had moved from Alberta into Montana.

With this virtual game and with much that comes through technology, there is a tremendous demand on the human being to be awake. Technology helps us as well as harms in politics, the economy, education, agriculture, medicine, social and cultural development and social media and in many areas of life. If we are not awake to it, if we use it without an inner compass, it can steal away from us what we need to develop as humanity in our times. Wakefulness is asked of us not to be grabbed by it, not to be sucked into it, not to be controlled by it. It can attack what makes us human – to walk, to speak and to think.

Here are some of the factors to be awake to or to ask when using technology: Does it make us dependent or self-sufficient? How much of it feeds on us like parasites? Does it give us the answers or allow us to search through inner inquisitiveness? Is it imposed on us through repetition, visual images, and unconscious impressions or does it leave us free? Does it unite us or separate us? Where does it lead us, to living forces or to dead ends?

Technology helps us to see the hunger in humanity for the spirit. It proves the lack of our connection to the divine, the despair of being left to our own means and the need to find the spiritual world anew.

When religion, the means to connect to the divine and to each other, fails us, and the desire to connect is still present, humanity seeks new ways to connect. We have email, Internet, Facebook, such connections that are more like band-aids, having a numbing effect, without really addressing the difficulty of human loneliness.

Can we say virtual reality is the shadow of the Maya that is now perceived as reality? Is it possible that creating and working with the virtual world is an expression of longing for reality,

for spiritual reality, a deep longing in the human soul needing to be redirected from the outer to the inner, from untruth to truth, from the virtual world to the spiritual world?

Truth and Responsibility:

Pontius Pilate asks: “What is Truth?” Today, being surrounded with many lies or more dangerously with half lies, we too ask? “What is Truth?”

In the Bible, we see the different ways of recognizing the truth. The disciples each go through their own experience of recognizing Christ. The centurion at the cross recognizes in his own way. Paul, on his way to Damascus, has his personal encounter with Christ and completely changes his direction through this encounter.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation in The Christian Community the child, on his way to becoming an adult, is given the promise to seek and you will find. It’s a promise Christ gives to all of humanity.

How we relate to untruth is part of the process of searching for truth. The temptation of our times is either to fall in untruth through blindness or sleepiness or unconscious tendencies and habits or to negate the untruth by seeing and judging it as wrong.

Is there another way to work with untruth?

We can develop a capacity to negotiate with the untruth. Instead of fighting, negating, judging or dismissing, we can work on developing a way of recognizing and having a conversation with the untruth. We could meet untruth through Maya, illnesses, conflicts, injustice and our shadow. In this meeting, instead of fighting, we can attempt to see what this untruth longs to become. This attempt can change a moment from falling into conflict to a door leading to peace.

Truth and knowledge come with responsibility, the responsibility of “Do not judge,” the responsibility of seeing not only with light but also with love. We see. We may not know how and how much. Truth reveals to us and it leaves us again. The responsibility of truth and knowledge can be carried only with utmost humility, with continuously being conscious that though we see, we still don’t see much. Though we know, there is still much that we don’t know.

Spirit and Language of Truth:

How do we learn the language of the spirit? How do we hear, speak and understand the language of truth?

I would like to share few ways that are important in our efforts to learn this language – the importance of asking questions, the importance of balance and wakefulness, the importance of prayer, and the importance of conversation.

One important way to search for truth and to learn this language, in any realm of life, is the way of asking questions, the importance of asking the right question! We ought to not assume but ask. We ought to not judge, but attempt to understand by asking open questions, by being interested,

yes, even being interested in the virtual world, as difficult as that may be. We ought to be interested and willing to seek for the truth in what disturbs us most, to seek for light in the darkest moments, in the midst of what we experience as evil and only through His presence, find the strength to transform and to love. Parsifal's question "What ails you?" is a necessary question for our times in our search for truth, light and healing.

The importance of balance and wakefulness is essential in our search for truth and knowledge and in how we find them in the world around us. How to keep balance between the inner and the outer? How to be awake to keep our attention in the realm of truth through the way that is not wide but narrow, not easy but difficult and often painful? How not to fall into the danger of self-pity on the one side and into the danger of self-righteousness on the other? How to find the strength and nimbleness to untangle the wish to be good, and right and perfect from the selfish motive and desire for more power?

We can learn the language of truth through a life of prayer, through praying alone and praying together. In order to be able to experience the past, the present and the future without losing ourselves in one or the other, we need a life of prayer. In order to find inner peace and inner equilibrium, we need a life of prayer. In order to free ourselves from our own will and connect with the will of the Father, we need a life of prayer. Christ prays to the Father for his disciples in the high priestly prayer: "Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth."⁵ Christ, who lives in a life of prayer, can reveal Himself to us, can reveal the purifying and freeing forces of truth to us through our life of prayer.

Truth is revealed through conversation. The importance of true conversation with living words in the presence of the other is lost when we live in the world of technology. The virtual world makes us deaf and blind and dumb. How do we resurrect our senses? A true antidote to the virtual reality is the reality of genuine, open, and free conversation. Why? Through such conversation, we experience truth. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them."⁶ Prayer recreates the bridge for us to develop a relationship with the divine. Conversation recreates the bridge for us to develop a relationship with the other.

In Goethe's fairy tale, the king asks the snake: "Whence comest thou?"
"From the crevices where the gold dwells."
"What is more glorious than gold?" asked the king. "Light," answered the snake.
"What is more precious than light?" asked the king.
"Conversation," replied the snake.⁷

This is not a kind of conversation where an outer authority communicates information to another. It is open conversation between two individuals, an "I" to "I" conversation. Through such conversation, thoughts, ideas and words come to life, from inside. They give voice to the inside.

⁵ John 17:17

⁶ Matthew 18:20

⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Fairy Tale of The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*

They give an expression of what lives in the soul and prepare fertile soil for understanding, a trusting and loving relationship. The Word finds a home in conversation!

Thoughts that live in everything reveal themselves through conversation. The spirit that lives in us, that lives in thoughts and in things finds a vessel in conversation.

With all these, learning the language of truth, coming to see, and the truth is never a given. It is always a grace. It is the grace that comes with a Whitsun experience. The disciples do their part. They gather indoors. They pray. They seek. There, in their midst descends the Comforter, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, and unites with them and unites them with each other and with the world. They start speaking and understanding the language of Truth. They are also understood. There is the beginning of the most precious moment of experiencing truth and feeling how this power of truth can set us free. True freedom comes in this knowledge of truth, in learning, speaking and experiencing the language of truth as Christ prepares the disciples on their way of seeking the Truth: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”⁸ Through a Whitsun experience, a new community is born, a community that is founded on truth and radiates love and understanding, peace and human freedom.

⁸ John 8:32