

Mysterious Boat by Odilon Redon

Seminary Newsletter

of the Christian Community in North America

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all from the Seminary in Toronto.

It is a joy, once again, to offer you all this seminary newsletter. In it you will find a collection of words and images that, we pray, can become windows. Our students have crafted and shaped these words over the course of the past year in response to the events, classes and special courses they have participated in. These are always “outer” things in which subtle and profound inner movements, wrestlings and transformations are taking place. These are invisible realities. This means that what is really happening at the seminary is hidden from view.

And this is where the ‘word’ comes in. And the need for windows. In order to connect with one another, to not only be ‘separate individuals,’ we need a way to ‘let the other in.’ We need ways to share with one another what is happening in the hidden chambers of the soul and what shines into these chambers from the spirit. By speaking to and with one another, we shape windows to see into realities that are not visible with physical eyes. This is both the mystery of communication and the work of ‘sacrament.’

From September 2023 through June of 2024 our students on-site in Toronto have been delving into the depths of these sacramental mysteries. In personal study, in art and in seminar conversations, this has been the focus of the year, but with a new and important emphasis: the ecclesia. Again and again, especially through our work with biblical texts and the words & actions of the seven sacraments, we sought to more deeply understand the reality and purposes of Christ-Community.

We discovered along the way that we are called, as a whole community, to become an image of Him, a window into His healing, whole-ing reality. Ecclesia is the Greek word for the gathered community of Christians, the one St. Paul calls in his letters, “the body of Christ.” Christian Community is called to be His word, expressing in the visible, sensible word Christ’s invisible, living presence.

It is fitting, then, that our whole year culminated in the Sacrament of Ordination. It was an event with many windows, and they were wide-open! The breath of the spirit was so present, made especially perceptible by the participation of five of the members of the circle of seven being along with a large and devoted community of Christians from near and far. A mood of hope and love permeated the weekend.

We hope that the words of this newsletter can let you in to some of the hidden life of the seminary. We hope they open up windows for you into the soul of our seminary community.

In gratitude for your continued support and with love,

Patrick Kennedy Jonah Evans

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SECTION 1. REFLECTIONS ON ORDINATIONS

2024 Ordinations in Toronto

Ordinations were celebrated in Toronto for the second time in July of 2024. It was a warm and rich experience of Christ-Community, a true celebration with the feel of a summer wedding. Friends and members came from near and far along with five members of the international leadership of The Christian Community present, priest-representatives from South America and Europe and some twenty priests from North America to participate in and witness the consecration into priesthood of Claire Jerram, Marc Fortin, Daniil Kalinov and Gloria Connell. The following is a piece by someone experiencing ordination for the first time and who is now one of the students in our "Knowing Christ" program.

On Ordination And the Work of Marrying Body to Word

by Jasper Doise, "Knowing Christ" student

Christ borne in her hand, the priest touched her mother's face, offering the Peace.

That moment during the Consecration of the Human Being shattered normal time in me into the place where the seed, its root, and its fruit are co-present. The mute little pebble of a thing which then sprouts, burrows, reaches out, and drinks of dark Earth, then the sun-drenched branch-drooping thing it can bear and offer. I think these images, I remove the time-constraining 'thens', and I can begin to imagine the Tree of Life. Sometimes it appears before me unbidden, an unexpected gift, as during the celebration of these new priests.

We feel like mute little pebble-things sometimes. As seeds, we can feel the waiting-to-sprout possibility, but the physical body and its inheritances continually connect us to silencing, stilling inertia. Speaking with the dead feels dangerous like this. My grandparents are my bones, and both are dust. I'm made of petrified habits, and if that's all I can see and carry, I start to forget what life feels like. But my grandparents carried life through their bones and offered it to me, and my bones carry life.

Fully alive-ness feels way, way bigger than what our bones can carry. When preparing us to witness the Consecration of Priests in the Christian Community, Rev. Patrick Kennedy offered us a humbling image*: the child trying on their parent's shoes. They clomp around the house, raising their knees too high for normal walking so they don't stumble because the shoes hang on their toes like a protagonist on

the edge of a cliff, for dear life. For dear Life, we wear garments we can't deserve, because it's the only way to practice having bodies that fill them.

Being present at the church and seminary of the Christian Community in Toronto during the week of ordinations, we bore witness to four human beings undergoing a ritual of investiture: a bestowal and reception of vestments. The ordinands received the most obvious garments among the Community, paired with custodial responsibility for the ritual forms that carry the Sacraments, and thus they became formal priests.

The ritual forms are garments for the whole Community: too-big shoes that we get to clomp around in while we practice being fully alive, in the process of becoming fully human. When seated in rows facing the altar, it's possible to forget that we also play roles in the sacred performance being enacted in front of us by our representatives in vestments. They act out physically the inward action that is taking place in all of us. Together we all, in sacred play, learn to co-exist the Body of God. Those in vestments carry the action in a physically perceptible way, carrying on the work of the God that lived within a human body made of dust. To carry the work of embodiment is to bear the weight of dead things and move them, to bring them to life, to offer them purpose and meaning.

For taking on the custodial role of these ritual forms, for dedicating their lives to the care and celebration of the Sacraments, for offering themselves to be sent to the Community as carriers of Christ, let us recognize, bless, and support the new priests: Daniil Kalinov, Claire Jerram, Mark Fortin, and Gloria Connell Marin. May God strengthen them for the work of supporting the life becoming in all of us.

*taken from a sermon from Rev. Luis Gonzales, Peru.



2023 Ordinations in South America

The Christian Community in many regions has developed doorways into the residential seminary trainings in Canada and Germany. Similar to our Distance Learning Program, the Latin American Pro-Seminary began two years ago, meeting at first once a week online, and later three times a week online. South American leader Telma Dave directed the course, but all of the South American priests taught in it. The four trimesters, spread over two years, culminated last April in a ten-day retreat, where the eleven students gathered in-person to help prepare for the ordinations in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Reflecting on this culmination of her time in the Latin American Pro-Seminary, Gloria Connell, current student in the North American Seminary, writes the following:

My living experience through the Sacrament of Ordination *by Gloria Connell, newly ordained priest*

The Sacrament of Ordination, on 15-16 April 2023, was held for the first time in Latin America in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. This was the last sacrament that needed to be translated into Spanish. We are now able to celebrate and participate in the seven sacraments of The Christian Community in Spanish.

As a student of the Latin American Pro-Seminary, I traveled from Santiago, Chile to attend the ordinations and to participate, as a preparation for this great event, in all the activities that took place around it.



the author with her husband, Luis

Those days proved to be intense, and as the dates were approaching one could feel a certain anxiety and nervousness in the atmosphere. The whole congregation was preparing the physical space to host this important event in the history of The Christian Community in Latin America.

Once in the church to celebrate the Sacrament of Ordination and after the candles on the altar were lit, we could hear the music resounding. The sound of the music permeated the whole church and our hearts. I have engraved in my heart the image of Nahuel and Nicolás entering the church, dressed in their white albs with their belts on. It was like seeing the image of newborn human beings (having only a physical body). As the celebration progressed, they were en clothed by the other bodies.

When the time came to read the Gospel, we heard for the first time the voices of the priests being ordained. Their voices had a pristine and clear tone. They pronounced the words of the Gospel in such a way that one could perceive how they were creating something visible in front of all of us witnessing the ordination.

When the stoles were placed on them, an image that symbolizes the "carrying of Christ in the priesthood," the gesture of crossing both ends of the stole in front of their chest represented to me the state of being ready, ready for a new work, ready to take a new road, a new path in this world.



FRIENDS CIRCLE

Go beyond the newsletter and join our *Circle of Friends*: special online content, meetings and communications. Sign up at www.christiancommunityseminaryca/friends-of-the-seminary

You are also warmly invited to join Patrick and Jonah on
The Light in Every Thing,
their weekly conversational podcast:
www.patreon.com/ccseminary



SECTION 2. SEMINARY LIFE

Toronto: We began again in September 2023



New group of Seminarians flanked by Toronto Seminary Directors

From left to right: Rev. Patrick Kennedy, Cecilia Velasquez (Lima, Peru), Min Wang-de-Jong (Copake, NY), Gloria Connell (Santiago, Chile), Juroce Miranda (Uribici, Brazil), Christopher Coffey (Chapel Hill, NC), Daniil Kalinov (Moscow, Russia), Claire Jerram (Baltimore, MD), Silke Chatfield (Bristol, UK), Shannon Young (Spring Valley, NY) and Rev. Jonah Evans

On September 3, the Seminary of the Christian Community in Toronto began another year with nine students, many of whom had waited many years to arrive due to many circumstances, including the recent travel restrictions. Students came from around the world, Peru, Chile, Brazil, the United States, Russia and the UK. The Seminary experience began with a moving Sacrament of Marriage conducted by Rev. Patrick Kennedy. This was a fitting beginning, as the overarching theme for this year's Seminary studies is *Christ's redemptive deed on Golgotha and continued redemptive work in the sacraments*.

Throughout the week, the Seminarians became acquainted through sharing their moving autobiographies, focusing on the highlights of their lives, particularly the road to the Seminary.

Seminary Trip to Germany

by Claire Jerram

In the first two weeks of December, eleven Toronto Seminary students visited our sister seminary in Stuttgart, Germany.

All of our older priests trained in Stuttgart, as it was The Christian Community's only seminary for decades. Now three seminaries train Christian Community priests: Toronto, Stuttgart, and a third one in Hamburg. Each has its own style. In the Toronto seminary, one can become ordained without learning German, although knowing German enriches the experience immensely. Our directors planned this trip to connect us with the students from all over the world who are on the same path.

Here is a link to the website of the Stuttgart Seminary:

🌐 <https://www.priesterseminar-stuttgart.de/index.php/homepage.html>



Herzlich Willkommen ("welcome from the heart" in German)



The Seminary, built after the second world war on Spittlerstrasse, stands two blocks from Stuttgart-Mitte, the biggest of Stuttgart's four Christian Community congregations, where one can attend the Consecration of the Human Being any day of the week. A few more blocks away stand the Eurythmeum (Eurythmy school), the first Waldorf School, Rudolf Steiner Haus, and a Waldorf Teacher Education Seminar.

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I had visited the Stuttgart seminary several times in my three years of study and looked forward to the beautiful shared meals, to the close communal life (students all live in the same building where they study), and to hearing German, Spanish, French, Russian, Dutch and English every day. This year the students seemed even more international, like their three seminary directors, Mariano Kasanetz (Argentina), Xenia Medvedeva (Ukraine), and Georg Schaar (Germany). Students welcomed us all to drop into a choir

practice every morning before the 7:30 service and on Tuesday nights. What a joy to hear four-part harmony ringing through the building.

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After a warm welcome dinner from the students, a preparatory conversation with Patrick and Jonah and a Sunday service at Stuttgart-Mitte, five of us embarked on a train journey to Berlin. There we met with the Circle of Seven to see if they would confirm Patrick and Jonah's recommendation that we begin the ordination preparation semester in Toronto in January.

Five students from the Stuttgart seminary, also from five different countries, are already in ordination preparation. The day we arrived in Berlin, they had all received their final "yes." This means that the entire priest circle had also confirmed the Circle of Seven's decision. At this point, the only thing that stands between these five and their ordination in February would be a decision of their own to step away. Later in Stuttgart, we had the opportunity to get to know these five and to share notes on the differences and similarities of our journeys.

With fluttering hearts, we knocked on the door of the Berlin headquarters of The Christian Community. The seven priests who hold the leadership of the movement welcomed us, and we began study, conversations and meals together. After a night of sleep in a nearby hostel, these meetings continued. We discussed our strengths and weaknesses. These four men and three women carry many responsibilities. Some of them are lenkers (coordinators) of a region, or congregational priests in addition to their role in the leadership. Our own Patrick Kennedy was already working with them as he has been invited to replace one member, Gisela Triemer, stepping off the Circle in June. Even with all they carry, I felt the peace and hope of Christ in their working mood with each other, and with us.



Ordination candidates at the Circle of Seven offices: Claire Jerram (U.S.), Gloria Connell (Chile), Bridgette Siepker (South Africa), Daniil Kalinov (Russia), Marc Fortin (Canada)

At the end of the second day, we all received the welcome to the ordination preparation semester for which we had hoped. Two months before the July ordination, we will hope for the final confirmation from the priest circle which the Stuttgart group has already received.

After Berlin, we returned to Stuttgart to join the other Toronto students in a week-long main lesson already in progress. Tom Ravetz, the lenker for The Christian Community in Great Britain and Ireland, created a picture of the heavenly hierarchies and how they relate to our priestly work as human beings, connecting earth with heaven. With Laurens Hornemann, who visited from his congregation in Dortmund, Germany, we envisioned the future of The Christian Community and how new impulses could come into being. With Tabea Hattenhauer from Hamburg-Harburg, Germany, we learned from the personal stories of a new priest, and practiced a meditation to deepen our connection with Christ. We finished our intensive Biblical studies trimester with student presentations. Each of us studied one word in the John Gospel, and what this word teaches us about the community of God, in relation to the rest of the Bible, especially Genesis, and our lives.



An evening stroll through the Stuttgart Christmas Market

Toward the end of our trip, students from both seminaries presented speech, choir singing, and instrumental music. After a shared feast, poetry and song continued, and all got up and participated in folk dances from Israel and elsewhere.

Thank you, Patrick and Jonah, for this amazing trip, and to those of you who support and accompany the seminary with prayer and financial support! Such a small religious movement needs to bridge regions, cultures, and languages, connecting to its common star. This visit really built such bridges.

What is Love? A Word about a Word

by Claire Jerram

On Wednesday, 22 November, the nine on-site seminary students presented their work with the Word to the congregation and guests, including the students from Rudolf Steiner College. The sharing was opened by a word about Love from Claire Jerram. In this article we are happy to share the transcript of her speech and more details about the event.



At the end of September, the students of Rudolf Steiner College Canada (RSCC) had invited the Seminary students for their Michaelmas festival. ([Click here to see a blogpost about this event on the RSCC blog.](#)) We were very glad to reciprocate by inviting the RSCC students to the Seminary for a sharing out of our work with the Word. During the event, the audience heard an excerpt from the story of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible, a contemplation on the process of initiation as described in Rudolf Steiner's Christianity as a Mystical Fact, two Psalms, and poems from Gerard Manley Hopkins and Angela Morgan. The seminarians also sang a traditional shape note hymn "David's Lament". The audience could also appreciate the artwork from the Seminary Art course and join the students to sing an "Amen" by Julian Pook and express Alleluia in eurythmy. Afterward, guests and the seminary students had time to get to know each other over refreshments. The whole event was opened by a word from Claire Jerram. Below you can find the transcript of her speech. You can also see more photos from the event in [the RSCC blogpost about it.](#)

Welcome to the Seminary of the Christian Community in North America. Part of what we learn here is to serve the

Word. What is our experience of the Word in our time? Perhaps you grew up watching "A Charlie Brown Christmas" at this time of year. If you did, you would have seen cartoon children walking around, talking to each other. And if an adult spoke, you would hear no words, just an indistinct, "Wah wah wah." As a teacher, I sometimes felt that my students experienced my words in this way. Another experience of the word that we have is little black marks upon white paper or screen. Here, as in the "Wah wah wah," a mere fragment of the Word shows itself.

In reality the Word is a being. One way we can get closer to the full reality of the Word, is to begin to love its children, that is — to love and learn about each word. Today in our speech sharing, you might hear some words that create specific pictures for you: God, Lord, Christ, Jesus. I ask you to listen with an open ear, to ponder about the full reality of these words. And I will speak today about another word: Love.

We use the word love all the time. Ninety-five percent of all pop songs sing about love. We can get the feeling that it must be important. But also the feeling that there must be more to this word than attraction and sentimentality. The ancient Greeks had at least three (some say six) words for love, and C. S. Lewis writes about these as well: romantic love, familial love, and unconditional, sacrificial love. In

English, we can hear that all these shades of love come together in one word, a word which poses us a challenge.

M. Scott Peck, the writer of *The Road Less Travelled*, saw many patients in his psychology practice. People showed much confusion about the meaning of the word love. He came to the understanding that love is time plus effort. If someone spends time with you, and they make an effort for you, they express love. The more time we spend, the more effort we make for someone, the more we love them.



Seminary students performing "Hallelujah" in Eurythmy

There was a man who lived in Roman times: very educated, a world traveler, much like people of today. He held not only knowledge, but power. He stood by and approved while a circle of his friends threw stones at a man until he died. A few days later, this man, later called Paul, was walking along a road toward the city of Damascus. He was planning further violence against the friends of the man who was stoned. Suddenly Paul experienced the being of love. He saw a bright light and heard a voice. The being of love challenged Paul. It told him that he was persecuting it. Paul heard this voice, took it in deeply. This being of love changed Paul. He spent the rest of his life sitting at the feet of love, giving it all his time and effort, traveling the whole Roman world by foot, and learning what love would have him do.

And here is what he learned about love: what it is, what it is not. He learned that it is a teacher which can mature us, can lead us from a partial knowing to revealing its true being. He wrote about this to some friends in the Greek city of Corinth, who were also trying also to learn about love.

1 Corinthians 13 (New Revised Standard Version)



If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

SECTION 2: "WALKING WITH CHRIST" PROGRAM

Silvia Rodriguez

Mexico City



Meet Silvia Rodriguez, co-founder of Colegio Inlakesh, a Mexico City Waldorf school. She works there now as Pedagogical Leader and handwork teacher. She has been participating in the seminary's Distance Learning Program for several years. This year she will work as an intern to start an affiliate in Mexico. Silvia is working with German mentor priest in Cali, Colombia, Andreas Loos. They meet every month. In the meantime, five or six people (from a total of ten) meet every other week to read the gospel and a sermon which Andreas sends each week from Colombia. Silvia hopes to start a study group around the Christian Community Creed. See: www.thechristiancommunity.org/the-creed/

She also hopes for the community to visit the homeless or the elderly, create toys to raise money for two priest visits per year, and collect the objects for use at the altar. She will visit the congregation in Colombia for two weeks at Easter time to help, learn, and attend a priest garment sewing workshop. Silvia will organize the priest visits, which includes finding a venue.



Marc Delannoy

Intern, Ottawa, Canada

Marc Delannoy, who completed his first on-site seminary year in 2022, is also a Waldorf teacher. He writes from Canada:

I am participating in the Ottawa Christian Community (a Toronto affiliate) by organizing monthly devotional gatherings. The hope is to build up the community through regular devotion and other events. I am also involved with the Montreal Christian Community, about two hours east by car (also a Toronto affiliate). So just like I navigate between



English and French in my teaching capacity at two different Waldorf schools, I navigate between two different Christian Community congregations. For both, I prepare a monthly newsletter, the one for Montreal, bilingual - English and French.

In Ottawa, I offered a talk as part of a Michaelmas conference to answer the following question given by the local anthroposophical branch leadership: “What does it mean to become human in the Earth phase of evolution in connection with the Christ being?”

Still, my most consequential undertaking is the guidance of a study group both live and virtual every two weeks, essentially (but not exclusively) on Genesis. I cross the river to go to Gatineau, Quebec, to a member’s apartment who hosts some of us as I discuss on zoom various topics related to a given theme. What is new is that it is virtual, but also, in French. On any given evening some 6 to 8 people attend.



Altar Painting brought from Germany to Montreal in the 1950's

Genesis offers the meditative reader an abundant picture language (Heaven and Earth, the waters and the dry land, darkness and light, human and animals, the garden and the wilderness, etc.) that each function as seeds, growing with us, giving root to our understanding of Him, who is the meaning of the Earth and humanity’s goal.

Sean Waters

Ithaca, New York, USA



Sean Waters, a dairy farmer at Remembrance Farm near Ithaca, NY, will also be planting the seeds of a new affiliate this year. Like Silvia, Sean has been participating in the Distance Learning Program for some time. His community has been gathering since May, when Rev. Robert Bower from Hillsdale, NY, gave a talk. They hold a weekly devotional gathering, which once a month expands to include a meal and shape note singing. Sean is also gathering altar objects; Ithaca's first Consecration of the Human Being was celebrated on November 11. Additional services are planned for February and May. The service will be held on the farm, as are the devotional gatherings.

Camilla Lake

College Park, Maryland, USA



Camilla Lake is serving the Greater Washington-Baltimore Congregation in College Park, Maryland this year. She is living in the apartment on the church property and is involved in supporting many aspects of community life. Camilla's internship project specifically focuses on how to best provide children and families with the spiritual nourishment needed today. She and her mentor priests, Emma Heirman and Matthias Giles, have begun their studies on this question with an early book by Evelyn Francis Derry (Capel), the first woman Christian Community priest ordained in England, called *Growing Up in Religion*. Together, they continue to experiment and adapt the Children's Program in ways that encourage the children to

feel connected to the altar, to the priests and to the life of the congregation. Camilla will continue her part-time administrative work for the seminary around outreach, admissions and the Distance Learning Program. You might also recognize her as the writer of the weekly notes for *The Light in Every Thing* podcast.

Some of the initiatives that have taken root so far are establishing the "Garden House" as the new children care space. Work is about to start on a path connecting the Garden House, which is deeper on the property, to the Parish House, which houses the chapel. Also in development are new landscaping and play areas to clearly establish a "home" for the children on the land.



Currently, there are seven families with eleven young people, ranging in age from 5 - 15. When it's feasible, the older girls watch the younger ones during the adult service, otherwise Camilla steps in. Slowly, the children have bridged the span of their ages and are now often deeply engaged with chalkboard games of Pictionary, learning magic tricks from each other, or sharing their stories or drawings. A balance has been struck between the sacred mood of the Children's service, story and singing with the energetic, creative hilarity of healthy children.

Naomi Mattana

Internship in San Francisco, California, USA



Naomi (left photo) and in the front row along with fellow interns (in italics) at the seminary in June 2023 for the Distance Learning Program retreat/open course, "In the Image of God".

Back row: Damian Gilroy (priest, Adelaide, Australia) Sean Waters, intern in Ithaca NY, *Silvia Rodriguez, intern in Mexico City, Claire Jerram on-site student, author of this article*, Patrick Kennedy, Jonah Evans, *Camilla Lake, intern in College Park, MD*. Front row: Mary Jane Little, Wang Peng, Min Wang de Jong, Melanie Nason, Silvia Lissett, *Naomi Mattana, intern in San Francisco, CA*, Nicole Reinhart, *Marc Delannoy, intern in Ottawa, ON*.

SECTION 3. LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

The Sickness of Sin and its Medicine - a peek into the classroom

by Silke Chatfield, Bristol, England

In the following article, Silke Chatfield, a seminary student, reflects on the week-long courses taught in the seminary by visiting teachers Rev. Ben Black and Rev. Luis Gonzales. The paintings that you can see throughout the article were done by seminary students during Luis's class.



After two weeks at the Seminary, we had the privilege to receive our first guest teachers. The first course was held by Rev. Ben Black from Cologne (Germany) and we dived into the theme of the Origin of Sin. It was not an easy topic. But it was fundamental for the understanding of the fallen nature of the human being – why we are the way we are.

Going back in time, we were taken through the cosmic evolution of spirit beings and mankind: starting from Old Saturn to present Earth, concentrating on the fall and rebellion of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic beings and the influence it had on mankind. The fall was both: a gift and a curse. It gave human beings freedom and knowledge. But with it, death, pain, suffering, and a separation from God had become a part of earthly evolution. Humans are “innocently guilty,” infected with the “sickness of sin.”

Then a question arose. If it is a sickness, what's the medicine?

In our week with Rev. Luis Gonzales (from Lima, Peru) we started to explore some practical answers to this question. Focusing on the theme of “Evil,” we started by looking at the story of Jesus casting out a demon (Luke 8:26-37).

In this story we hear of a man who has been possessed by a demon for many years: driven out into the desert, naked and not in his right mind. Jesus approaches the man with one question: "What is your name?" What a simple question! And yet it is the most difficult question to answer, especially when dealing with our own "demons." Naming is the first step of acknowledging, of seeing a wound within us. To see and to name is the beginning of the path to redeem the wound. We can attend to it, giving it some space to be. We can even develop a relationship with it.

How is our relationship with evil, the wounds and the sickness of sin?

Recognizing that we always have a choice between good and evil, why is there so much pain and suffering in our lives? What can we do about it?

Rev. Luis Gonzalez led us very carefully through these questions with warmth and gentle humor.

Evil and suffering in the world are showing us something about our own evil and suffering, and there are two choices: either we perpetuate it or we try to heal that wound. The brokenness of the world can give meaning to our lives. It can become the invitation to acknowledge it, to name it, to sit with it.

It gives an opportunity to come closer to the Christ, to trust and engage in heartfelt, real prayer. Prayer becomes a way to connect to Christ, to go beyond our own emotions and thoughts.



*The Immaculate Conception,
by Pinturicchio, Bernardino*

When, in this fashion, we have laid a gentle foundation where these wounds can be held, the Christ can enter into our hearts and souls and help to transform them.

We were then led in an artistic exploration of this topic. We looked at a painting by Pinturicchio, depicting the immaculate conception.

The place of her womb, where the Christ can enter, is depicted with warm colors. The virgin herself is in a prayerful mood, surrounded by a golden glow.

We then were invited to take pastels and start working on a big piece of paper, very gently, "preparing" a gentle surrounding for our own wound. Building up a "womb" where our pain and suffering can be held and observed. We then added a "wound" each in our own way, for example, a dark blotch in the middle of our painting. Filling this space with the Christ, letting it be suffused by Light, was the last step. We could see how the wound, now transformed, can shine out again.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well

by Min Wang de Jong, New York

John 4 describes how Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, a place connected to the patriarch of the Old Testament. Through his powerful words, he heals her wounded past and creates a new future. Like in other scenes, John leads us on a journey from physical perception to soul-spiritual reality.

On the physical level, consider how tired and thirsty Jesus must be after walking through the desert around noon. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water at the well. He asks her to give him a drink. She also must have a very difficult life because she has to walk a long way during the hottest time to fetch water and she is alone. The woman responds, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9 English Standard Version). Here John states: "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Jesus breaks this barrier. Next, he offers the gift of God - living water - which points to the spiritual. The woman responds with the reverential title "sir," her view of Jesus going up from "a Jew" to "sir." But she immediately sinks back to the physical level: Look at him. No bucket. Where is the living water? He could not be greater than her ancestor Jacob.

But Jesus confirms that the water that he will give will become "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). The longing for the living water melts her doubts. In her mind, whoever could offer this living water would give her life again, for she now says, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water" (John 4:15).



A drawing of the scene by seminary student Juroce Miranda, who studied it last trimester



Surprisingly, Jesus does not respond to her appeal, but requests that she go call her husband. The woman tells him she has no husband. Jesus acknowledges she has told the truth of her life, as in fact she has had several husbands, and is presently living with someone to whom she is not married. But now he asks her to call her husband. In the language of the soul, what is the role of the husband in a woman's life? Both men and women contain masculine and feminine aspects. In each person, the soul aspect can be seen as feminine and the spirit as masculine.

In Judges 13 there is the story of the parents of Judge Samson.

Samson's mother is barren, yet an angel appears to her in a field and tells her that she will have a son. The angel instructs her regarding her future life with her son. The woman tells her husband and only then realizes she did not ask who the angel was. Her husband prays to God to see the angel again. The angel reappears to the woman in the same field and she runs quickly to get her husband, who has the courage to invite the angel for a meal and a conversation with him.

The husband's role here is thus to connect with God, just like our spirit guides our soul to have a right relationship with God through praying; inviting the angel for a meal and asking questions are all loving actions. The Samaritan woman is a love-seeker. Her soul is yearning for good guidance. All the men in her soul life could not offer the proper relationships with God. Now Jesus acknowledges her truthfulness, because she says she does not have a husband. Her soul is seen and accepted fully by Jesus.

Seen in this way by him, she realizes Jesus is a prophet of God. She asks her deep question about where to worship God. Jesus tells her, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). He then reveals that he is the Messiah, the living God.

She hears about the Messiah and trusts he will teach her people. When Jesus tells her He is the Messiah, we can imagine the woman's soul as the noon sun, so bright! Her strong will tells her to share her knowledge of Jesus Christ with all the people she loves. She runs away even without her water jar because she knows she will come back with her people. She is the first apostle in John's Gospel, to tell other people the good news! Her soul gets healed through the conversation with Christ, overcoming her prejudice, her doubts, and her fear through her wonder, her reverence and her willing act to bring her people to the Messiah. Most people of this community through this woman's testimony hurry to Jesus. They ask him to stay and strengthen their souls. They also receive the living water through their own experience. Later, they say to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world" (John 4:42) Every soul of this kind who encounters and experiences Jesus Christ can be healed.

We thus experience the encounter between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman as rising from the physical, to the soul, to the spiritual level. We need to lift up our eyes higher and higher in order to prevent erecting prejudices and doubts that block our understanding.



An Excursion to Niagara Falls

Windows into the Bible

by Juroce Lisboa de Miranda, Brazil

These wonderful drawings were made by Juroce, a seminary student from Brazil, in the context of the "Bible Studies" course at the Seminary. They touch on two important topics that we have been covering this Trimester: the theme of Baptism and the story of Elijah the prophet.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him, and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" (Matt. 3:14-17)



The Baptism of Jesus

"When they had crossed [the Jordan], Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.' And Elisha said, 'Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.' And he said, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.' And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' And he saw him no more" (2 Kings 2:9-12).



"Elijah went up by a whirlwind..."

Writings from the “Image and Word” Class

This fall, seminary students explored a way of looking at nature that prepares one for writing sermons. They looked at the ground, a plant and a candle. First, they observed what one can perceive with the senses, then the verbs (the activities), then the being-ness of the object, what it might say if it could talk. Finally, in all these approaches, some gentle hints of the moral nature of the creator come to the fore, for the creator lives in the creations.



The Ground Speaks

by Daniil Kalinov:

I am the ground. My face is covered with oceans and plains, mountains and valleys. Rivers carve into my surface. Forests and cities stretch their roots into me. I give space to all of them, support all of them, sustain all of them.

I allow the plants to grow in me and nourish them. And I receive their leaves, fruits, and branches as they wither and fall on me. I give dwelling to insects and worms. And I become their grave as they perish. I let animals run on my surface. And I cover their decaying flesh as they die.

I let human beings dig into me and find my hidden treasures. I allow them to drill tunnels into me and build dwellings of concrete under my surface. I also observe them as they hide in these dwellings of concrete when their bombs burst on my surface.

I see all that happens on me and in me. I allow it and I do not judge. I will be there for you when you need me. I will take care of all that you leave me. At least, I will try.



By Claire Jerram: To a Candle

I see you standing upright. You slowly consume your body of wax and your spine of string by burning. You show the flowers, the table, yourself in a gentle light. You heat up the air in a column above you. I can only feel, not see that hot air. Your father, the sun, shows the world, shows more than you show. When he sinks below the horizon, then your light's deeds will appear more strongly. You will remind us of him while he is away on a journey. For your wax came from the bellies of bees, suffused with summer sunshine. Your wick came from cotton fields, coaxed up by his rays. The person who dipped the candle served the sun's mission by lighting the world with you, his creation.

SECTION 4: DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

Dive Deep. Feel Everything

Reflections on the Open Course: “The Delight of the Devoted Soul”

by Vaike Neeme-Samson, Australia

The reciprocal dance between human inner and outer development re-cultures many relationships between individuals and institutions alike. It is astounding to contrast how a mere community member may have interacted with the Seminary of The Christian Community in not so long-ago times gone by (I’m told), now that we are able to communicate with the seminary directors through a comments feed on a mobile phone, in real time, complete with the occasional emoji! Even considering the limitations and risks of the yet-amazing digital medium, the immediacy and resultant intimacy that becomes possible births a different kind of relating. The same also becomes possible between the manifold, newly found, and far-flung siblings-in-Christ that congregate in such places. Many people, myself included, have expressed wonder and surprise at the authenticity of connection that is possible when participating in the digital offerings of the seminary.

This is experienced through the Zoom-mediated Distance Learning Program (DLP), the profound sharing of the Living in Christ study group that appears even on YouTube, the recordings and comments of the Light in Every Thing podcast – and may even now be continuing as you read this blog.

Such was the very contemporary foundation for the Seminary Open Course in May, when these various communities met and communed with those who were resident in Toronto. How these devoted souls were able to delight so quickly and so deeply with each other, though mostly never having met in person, speaks perhaps to the theme of joy and its fullness of warmth. Emphasized by Reverend Patrick Kennedy as needed to remedy the danger of suffocation that a spiritual life without it would entail, this radiance of heart overcame any digital coolness in setting the scene for this sublime week.

Underneath and within the abundant offerings that unfolded this theme through sacraments, lectures, conversation, workshops and arts (including some raucous folk dancing one evening!) ran an underground river; a secret stream, no less joyful though sometimes varied in its experience. For me, this became apparent through a continued sensing of someone, just beyond my perception. Was someone just behind me, in the periphery of a group or moving out of the corner of my eye? My heart would leap, my breath inhale in readiness to speak and greet someone I sensed I must know. Eventually I settled on the gently astonishing fact that there was Someone Else Here (I’m smiling now at the memory!). At other times, some of them exquisitely painful in my own biographical setting, some more obviously incarnated people appeared alongside me, wordlessly bringing the loving solidity and intuitive compassion I needed in order to surrender and dissolve. This too brought another kind of delight.



*Ascension light in Bondi Beach, Australia,
near the author’s home.*

Experiencing some presentations from the resident seminarians that week and over the next weekend was also profound. As I reflected on what I sensed there, I realized that alongside the insightful content was a perception of light, playing around their form, like it can do on a pond in sunlight. And more than that, it was the sense of a being with whom they were in conversation as they spoke, delighting in each word that was birthed from the duet.

Indeed, as the week unfolded, I began to notice how beautiful each person was, marveling at their countenances; a phenomenon that was happily found by others who shared the same discovery with me.

This beauty, unearned, sorely needed and gratefully received continued in the sanctuary of my host's home, so generously opened to me. And when she brought me to her daughter's home to share a meal with their family, the wonder and profound conversation continued. A fellow DLP-er, too, was being hosted there, and when we greeted each other with a bear hug, we were asked if we already knew each other. "No, that's just the kind of relationships that form at the seminary!" my host's daughter replied.

Towards the end of the week, Patrick showed us a crab-apple blossom and asked, "What is it holding back?" He then shared further the fact that it was actually in a process of dying. This brought to my mind the accompanying fact I have noticed before, that the rich colors of the Autumn leaves similarly show their fullest hues in falling. Landing back in my Southern Hemisphere home, I learnt too that this same time of year, locally named the season of "Marrai'gang," is marked by the bursting and dropping to earth of the radiantly crimson lillipilly berries (and the mating season of the quoll, a creature reasonably similar to a rabbit!), and also the revelation of complex color landscapes on the trunks of trees that shed bark around now.

The birth, death, resurrection and revelation of Christ is a whole-earth happening, though revealed in manifold specific ways. Asked to describe how this festival is experienced "down under," I can say that Passiontide speaks into the exhausting end of summer heat, aligning a burning that is both inside and out. Easter usually occurs within a still golden and resplendent sunlight, but often, around Ascension, the depth drops out and the light appears more ethereal. I often find that with the glare gone, I can suddenly see more easily and evenly into the eyes of my companions, feeling kinship and community within the bereft aspect of Ascension. When Whitsun arrives, the colder weather has, too, and experiencing that the outer sun has reemerged as an inner flame accompanies times of nestling around hearths.

Here, now, as I recollect that special week in May, I feel what the strains of "Christe Agsdga" ("Christ is Risen"—the Georgian song shared with us) did to my soul; mixing beauty and pain into an immense joy that holds both, and more. I think of the altar picture in the Toronto chapel, with the wounded hand of Christ radiating the same mystery, so profound in Jonah's sharing that brokenness and being made whole, coexist. I long for the intensity of that time and yet rest in the knowing shared by both Reverend Kate and Patrick Kennedy that the breathing between emptiness and fulfillment is a gradual dynamic pulse of a joy that will one day be complete.

Yearning accompanies my cherishing the memory as I walk through my life back home, and I am becoming more awake to my prayer for Christ community being answered in unexpected moments and surprising locations. I'm learning to be present for them, and trust in their reemergence as they dissolve like Ascension clouds.

I'm attempting to be brave enough to turn, like Mary, away from the grave, and towards the Delightful One, He that was so playfully and tangibly present around, alongside and within us throughout our Open Course. Although the grave remains a newly essential part of the garden, He Is Not There.

I'm reminding myself, like the "Little Match Girl" in Hans Christian Andersen's story, to turn to the other, and give everything. Even though it appears to some as a tragic death in the cold, really, her giving away the last match sparks a flame that can shine a way across the threshold of separateness, finding reunion and joyful healing in what and who is beyond.

I'm remembering the potent advice given to me by a friend as I left to find you all in Canada: Dive deep. Feel everything.

Delight of the Devoted Soul

by Nicole Reinhart

When I arrived at the Seminary the first week in May, the first thing I noticed was a group gathered in the foyer of the church. Their faces were alight with the effervescence of the meeting of "heart friends." Their joyful conversations floated into the air around them, spilling out to fill the space with light and warmth. I later discovered that these were the members of the DLP "One" class.

Seeing the character of their class community, I began to reflect, "What is the character of our DLP "Two" class? Our joy had a different color. It seemed to be birthed from the fount that is the deep well of walking with and transforming suffering. Our conversations were filled with earnest sincerity, quietness and vulnerability.

We soon met the on-site students, our shepherds throughout the week. They folded us into the already strongly knit garment of community they had woven together throughout the year. The ordinands shone upon us with their emerging priesthood, and also vibrated in the quiet separation of inwardness that accompanies an approaching turning point of a "before and after" moment of life.

In the midst of all of us, came the DLP "Presentation Only" participants. From the periphery of our workings together, they arrived as a palette of individuals, sharing with all of us the insights that can arise in solitude.

Together, we discovered our deepest gratitude for the vessel of The Christian Community in Toronto, which willingly received human beings from all over the world. For us, they opened the doors to their congregation, their homes, and their hearts.

Out of these circles we met those whose hearts overflowed from personal encounters with Christ Jesus. We met those whose thinking was set aflame by their love of scripture. We met those full of loving devotion, and those who had the courage to ask hard questions. We met those gifted in speech, conversation and poetry, in music and movement. We met those who had lived a lifetime in our congregations, and those who were experiencing The Consecration of the Human Being for the first time. And in the background, always the quiet workers. The ones who made the coffee, swept the floors

and organized the zoom calls. And, of course, we had our dear teachers, selflessly offering the fruit of their long and authentic paths with Life in Christ.

At the center was the One we have all chosen to look toward and follow.

We delighted in the forming of this momentary community, shining in the multifaceted countenances of Him. There was no end of laughter, except in the bittersweet joy of departing from dear friends.

Here in North America, none of us need look back very far in our heritage to remember that our ancestors were strangers in a foreign land. As we say in Maine, we were actually all, once upon a time, “from away.” Together, as we begin to learn again about the Great Spirit of this land from our First Nations brothers and sisters, we navigate a place on earth that is so filled with diverse individual human experiences, that is unlike any other.

It is into this unique place on the earth that we once received the beautiful sacraments and traditions that are the Ground of our beloved movement. For our founders, these were the forms one walked within to come near to Christ Jesus. We, too, know this to be true. And also, we are wondering, “how can we receive these beautiful traditions from our founders and transform them into something that truly represents the hearts of those who are walking with Him now, and in this time and place?”

This journey begins always in seeking Him, and seeking Him in the other. It unfolds in the sensitive discernment of recognizing His true voice. And it begins to open in possibility when we long to devote our hearts to the mind of God, and unite our will offerings with His hopes for His greatest project and deepest love: ourselves. In the heart of our vast region,



A group picture of DLP students and seminary students

A Prayer for the Seminary

*May we grow our roots evermore deeply
into our Sacraments,*

*Vowing always to honor the Ground upon
which we walk.*

May we seek the Spirit working in this land

*Listening always to the voice that leads us
into a future of new creations.*

*May our hearts ever widen in devotion
to His heart,*

Delighting always in His light in others.

*May we be the forming and re-forming of
his Beloved Community.*

Amen

and in relationship with our world-wide friends who have joined us in our working, the widening circle of the North American Seminary has become a place that cherishes the traditions offered to us from our founders, and a place where deepening individual relationships with Christ Jesus are bearing new traditions that reflect the human rainbow that is our heritage. May this always be so.

A Path of Healing Through Christ

By Lisa Ni Conchuir, Distance Learning Student, Melbourne, Australia



Angel in the Sun by J. M. W. Turner reflects to me how Christ and the angelic beings are ever present in the life of every human being waiting to be invited to enter.

The following words are of my personal journey of healing through Christ, particularly through The Christian Community. My words are in no way prescriptive or an answer to “how to heal through Christ,” but a story of discovery of “Life” that is ongoing.

For around 20 years of my adult life, I lived with a deep experience of depression that evolved into chronic fatigue. I struggled to comprehend any purpose to my life and to comprehend how others experienced purpose in their lives. A standout thought during this time was one of “worthlessness.” This sharing, however, is about the journey of emerging from this inner landscape of darkness.

Goodness, where to begin and what to choose? I’ll begin with a book that a new friend at the time, when I was 28, suggested that I read.

She had been talking to me of The Christian Community and how highly she considered Rev. Lisa Devine, because I had turned away from Christianity many years before. The book was *The Childhood of Jesus* by Emil Bock. This was my first foray into reading either a Christian Community or anthroposophical book. As I read this book my heart began to vibrate and I had an inner knowing that this description of the two Jesus children was true. From there I developed my relationship with The Christian Community in Melbourne, Australia.

In time, I engaged in counseling with Rev. Lisa Devine, and, after many years of difficulty with counselors, I felt “understood.” I began to learn that what I was going through could be explored on various levels of body, soul and spirit. The spiritual/soul understanding was like receiving an important piece of a puzzle that helped everything else find its place. Life began to make sense.

Skipping ahead quite a few years now, I would attend the Sunday talks offered by our priest Rev. Lisa Devine, and later Rev. Cheryl Nekvapil, though I did not attend *The Consecration of the Human Being*.

For many years I attended these talks, and there came a time when I began to take one aspect or teaching of what I had heard and apply it to my life. I could see areas of my personality reflected in the stories and character traits that were of my lower self. There were suggested exercises or contemplations which I would do, and through this I was able to change and lift my thinking to observation rather than “poor me” and “judgement” of myself and others. This was over a period of time, but slowly, slowly I was changing. My depression continued to lift, I was able to be more observant of my feelings, thoughts and actions and move from a habitual response to a considered response ... sometimes :). The talks of the teachings of Christ and his life, combined with discussion and sharing from those attending, enabled an unfolding of my inner being and a stepping closer to the healing power of Christ. There was a “truth” experienced in these occasions that called me and somehow helped me to evolve.

After many years of attending the church, quietly and keeping myself on the outside, I chose to attend The Consecration of the Human Being. I had attended only a few times before and was not moved by the experience, though I loved and received much benefit from taking my daughter to the Children’s Service. I chose to attend The Consecration of the Human Being again because I had looked at the congregants as they were coming out of the chapel and recognized that they “had a glow.” Something was happening in there that I did not understand and I wished to understand it ... and the glow looked good, too! I attended and engaged by focusing on the words of the priest as much as possible, visualizing “light” crosses in my inner body as I performed the physical crosses, and, lo and behold, I walked out a different person. I felt that what I would call a spark of light inside me that had been waiting to be lit, had now been lit. I experienced something of the life of Christ, and though I did not know what it was or understand how the change happened, it happened. Soon afterwards, I attended a Christian Community retreat, where during a nature observation exercise, I had a momentary experience of Christ and God as the Ground of the World. For two months after this I had no depression, which was amazing, as I had not been able to make it through a week without at least one day of depression for many years. I did not just “not” have depression, but I would say I “glowed.” I had no fear of people, no feelings of worthlessness, only of joy, friendliness, greater capability, and greater physical energy. In the third month the “glow” waned and depression slowly returned; however, it never returned in the same way. I had experienced a truth and clarity in myself that I knew existed, even when I was experiencing depression. In that time, I felt and knew that Christ was with me always, and I had found the purpose and meaning in life - to strive to know and be with Christ.

Now in my early 50’s, as I become older I become healthier - physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I certainly did not imagine this in my younger days and, more so, I feel younger in my being. In the past year, I’ve had a great blessing in being able to participate in the Distance Learning Program with the North American Seminary. Again, my relationship with Christ has deepened further, and I see the wonderful, never-ending journey of exploration of the Way, the Truth and the Life through Him. Though I know in this moment that Christ is always in my life and I can participate in his Life, there are still moments when I do lose sight of Christ. Through the course, we have learnt how to find Christ through prayer, through the gospels, through the festivals of the year, through discussion and sharing with fellow seekers and through the sacraments. Now, if I lose sight of Christ, I have many tools at hand “to seek him.” Every experience has been a blessing and all permeated through the love of Christ through the priests, members, and friends I have met and journeyed with through life and The Christian Community. And I recognize the love offered to me and strive, and fail, and strive again to offer it in return.

... I am writing this piece during Easter, and this Easter Sunday 2024, during the Consecration of the Human Being, I experienced for the first time the renewal of the life of Christ in the world and in myself. It was like an etheric light turned on in the chapel. The air was brighter, I was brighter inside myself coupled with an experience of joy, gratitude, and love for the other. It was wondrous: “Christ really was renewed in the year,” and so was I, so were We. A life was stirred inside myself that was I yet more than I at the same time. My life that was darkened for so many years continues to become lighter and brighter as I journey to seek Christ. There are certainly still challenges. I am still enrolled in “Life Learning 101”... and He is with me, and I with Him as the healing journey to become human continues.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” by Daniil Kalinov

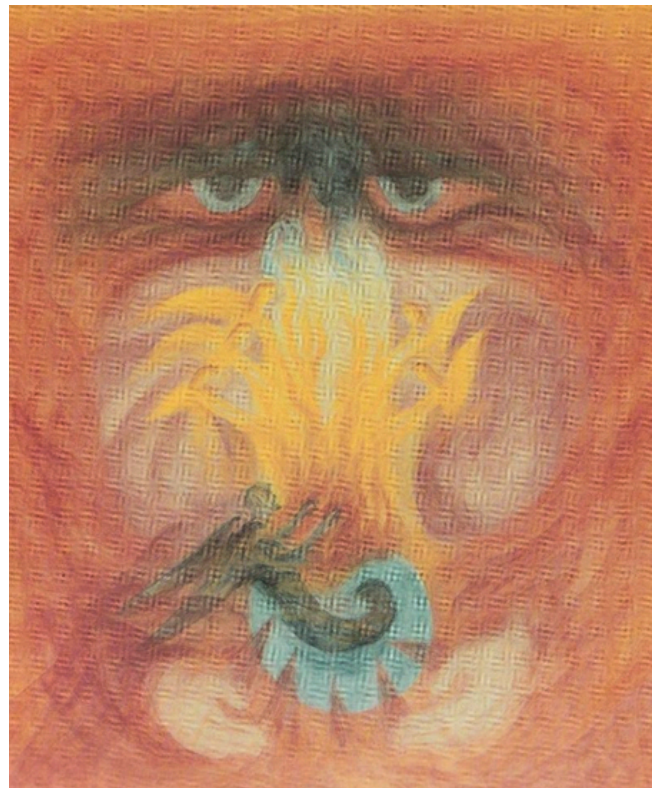
In this longer piece, Daniil Kalinov, then a student of the Seminary, reflects on the concept of fear in general and the notion of “Fear of God.” This essay is based on the short talk that Daniil gave in the affiliate community in Ottawa in October.

As my recent experiences have shown me – it is quite scary to give a talk! Many people seem to agree on this. In fact, fear of public speaking is one of the major anxieties that, together with many others (fear of rejection, fear of sickness, fear of the future, etc.), plague our modern society. Accordingly, one can easily find a lot of advice on dealing with fear: How can one find calmness? How can one escape anxiety? Yet, it seems to me, another question is not asked or answered often enough: Does fear have any meaning? Is fear a purely negative thing that one needs to free oneself from as soon as possible? Is there anything positive to fear?

In my experience, this question is also not dealt with thoroughly enough in our Christian Community circles. Especially, the one arguably

ultimate form of fear—“The Fear of God”—is rarely spoken about. Jon Madsen’s translation of the New Testament, that we often use in our circles, conveniently translates the Greek term (φοβέομαι) as “awe” or “reverence”, when it is used in relation to God or spiritual beings. And, of course, such a translation is justified.

The English word “awe” did initially have a much stronger connotation of “fear” and “horror” in it. Yet, today, “awe” has much more “wonder,” “amazement,” “reverence,” and “worship” in it. And so, the full manifold meaning of this word in Greek is obscured by such a rendering. (Here Jon Madsen, faithfully follows the German translation



A Reworking of Rudolf Steiner's “Wrath of God. Grief of God”, by an unknown artist

of Emil Bock that often renders φοβέομαι with “Ehrfurcht,” which is roughly equivalent to “awe” and “reverence” in English.). It is also easy to grasp how nowadays one can be quite “allergic” to the concept of “Fear of God.” We are past the point where we would like the word “fear” to describe our relationship with the divine. We do not want to be scared into faith by “fire and brimstone” sermons. And we cannot believe that God would want us to fear him. On the contrary, we know that His being is Love. And yet, it is hard to debate that Fear of God seems to have played an important role in the life of many Christians, and we cannot fully scratch this concept away from the New Testament. Could we find an additional depth to it? Could understanding “Fear of God” actually help us find meaning in our everyday fears and anxieties?

What do we actually fear? Superficially, it is often easy to answer this question: there is usually a situation, a person, an animal, or an object that causes fear. For example, I could be afraid of giving a talk. Yet, why am I afraid of that? It might be because I am scared of forgetting what I wanted to say, or, for example, of stuttering. And that might be caused by my anxiety and concern about how the audience will react. Will they judge me? Will they reject me? One can easily spin such sequences of thought and try to find the ultimate cause of fear. Often one would arrive at the fear of death (physical or metaphorical). But then, why does one fear death?

It seems that one of the essential features that unites all those fears is one thing: the unknown. We do not really know how the talk is going to go; we do not know how people will react to our actions, and most of us do not fully and experientially know what awaits us at death. Conversely, when something radically unknown and unexpected enters one’s life (like an unusual noise in the kitchen at night), anxiety can quickly arise in the soul.

Yet, when one is faced with the unknown – like our example of giving a talk – one could react to it in different ways. One option is to try to escape the unknown, to eradicate it. To this end, one could just cancel the talk and be done with it. Or, one could write down the text of the talk and read it aloud, hiding from the audience behind the sheets of paper. Or, one could try to take into account everything that could go wrong, and thereby lose oneself in the hive of never-ending anxious thoughts. In fact, it is precisely this desire to escape fear that leads to poor decisions or an overflow of anxiety. The only other option is to face fear, to embrace it, to enter into the unknown, and allow the unknown to unfold itself. But how could anyone do that?

To answer that question, let us first look at what a meeting with the unknown could entail. Besides the unknown that one faces, there is also the world of the known. It is one’s picture of the world, the representation of how things are and how one fits into the structure of the world. The known surrounds one like a bubble, a home, and makes the world manageable. But now, as the unknown approaches, one is faced with a real danger. The unknown could destroy this world that we have built for ourselves; it could wreak havoc on it and make things unmanageable. If this is the only possible outcome of the encounter, one is fully justified in trying to escape the unknown and protect one’s world of “the known.” However, there is another side to it. The unknown is also a “message” from the real world. It is something that comes towards one from the beyond. It brings something from outside of one’s “bubble”. Now, it could, of course, destroy this “bubble,” if one’s representation of the world is incomplete or wrong. But it can also bring one into the encounter with what is true, into communion with reality.

In Biblical terms, one could call this world of the known – the world of the idols. These idols are “the work of human hands” (Ps. 135:15). And they make the world predictable. If I need the rain to come, I should sacrifice to this idol; if I want the land to be fertile – to that one. Yet these idols are not fully real. “They have mouths, but cannot speak, have eyes, but cannot see” (Ps. 135:16), they can “neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell” (Deut. 4:28). They are not alive. It is the Living God, who is the Lord of Reality, the God “in whose hands is your breath” (Dan. 5:23). But just because he is living, I cannot fully predict what he will bring towards me in my life. In a certain sense, this God is the radically Unknown. And as the author of the letter to Hebrews says: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” (Heb. 10:31).



Abraham and Isaac on the way to the place of Sacrifice, by Marc Chagall

Could Abraham and Sarah expect a son to be born to them at such an old age? They were not able to conceive how such a thing is possible, even when a messenger of the Lord told them that the son is going to be born. And could Abraham expect that God would ask him to offer up his son, Isaac, his only son with Sarah, for whom Abraham has waited for such a long time? As he was ascending Mount Moriah to give Isaac back to God through the flames, was Abraham calm and peaceful? Or was his soul rather full of “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) as he followed his beloved son on the steep mountain path, the knife and the kindling for the fire in his hands? But, somehow, Abraham had trust in his God. He had faith that no matter what the Lord brought him in his life, it would turn out for the better. He did not fully know what God had in store for him. Yet he knew that God is good.

It is this Faith, this Trust that could allow us to welcome the unknown, face the fear that it brings with it, and harbor the courage to go through the gate of fear. And Christ can lead us to such Faith. Through his life, his being, his death and resurrection, he has revealed that what lies at the foundation of the world is Love. And that mysterious being who stands behind all things that come to us in our lives is Our Loving Father.

This Father does not want us to fear him. Yet, fear can often be a natural reaction when we find ourselves in his presence. But “his mercy is for those who fear him” (Luke 1:50). He will not leave us alone. The fear that we could experience towards him, if we do not try to escape it, if we allow ourselves to enter it; this same fear can become a gateway to a fuller, more real experience of his love for us. The “Fear of God” can become the beginning of the “Knowing of God,” of entering more deeply into the relationship with God. Or, as the Book of Proverbs puts it: “The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).



Coming Soon...

...Looking forward into our future, there is also another hidden reality beginning to shine through: **Rev. Emma Heirman** is beginning to join in retreats and conversations with Jonah and Patrick in order to prepare for her arrival as Seminary director in August of 2025. The flame that she carries is already being felt and beginning to unite and add its unique light to the warmth and glow the guiding spirit of our seminary. You can get to know Emma through our recent podcast conversations with her here: www.patreon.com/posts/before-sunrise-i-111227575



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