



## **North American Seminary Newsletter**

**Spring 2013**

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2013 spring newsletter of the seminary. We hope that it provides you with a window into our world – a world of study, experience, and sacraments.

The seminary continues to evolve. The renovations to our seminary building are complete and we have traded the kitchen at the church for two spacious classrooms, a library, and room to enjoy our shared breakfasts. Now the breakfast table is only our breakfast table. No crumbs find their way into our Greek New Testaments! Guests have come to join us several times and added to the fullness of our learning environment.

Soon, the second year students will leave Spring Valley to continue training with internships in Europe and the seminary prepares for a group of new first year students. Consider joining us in the fall for an Open Course.

The pages that follow include articles from students, guests and directors. We appreciate your support and hope you enjoy the updates, articles, and artistic contributions.

The Students



***Lisa Hildreth, Bastiaan Baan and Emma Heirman***

## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

~ Rev. Bastiaan Baan, Seminary Director

During the past semester I tried several times to condense into a single image what we have been experiencing at the seminary. Searching for such an image, I came across a celebrated painting by the artist Paul Gauguin. Its title consists of three questions:

Where do we come from?

Who are we?

Where are we going?

The painting, exhibited in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, is one of Gauguin's greatest works, and he knew it at the time. Everything in the painting expresses a riddle. It offers no answers, only questions.

I see several reasons that this image captures the outcome of our work at the seminary over the past months:

- Many of the studies during the semester also opened questions that cannot be answered by simple statements. Our Open Courses included themes—such as “End-of-Life-Decisions” with Hans van Delden, professor of medical ethics in the Netherlands; “Spiritual Hygiene and the Healing of the Soul” with Sebastian Lorenz, a psychiatrist in Germany; and “Signs of our Time” with philosopher and historian Christine Gruwez of Belgium—that brought us into realms where Gauguin's three questions become very vivid. We were fortunate to be able to view them through the eyes of contemporaries who are deeply and fruitfully engaged with the challenges of our time. Of course, we were offered not only questions, but also received suggestions for answers, most of which led us to still more questions. Before this semester began, we had not known, beyond a sketch of their plans, what these and our other new teachers would bring. Yet somehow each showed us, from a different profession and perspective, complementary images of our puzzling, tragic, and exhilarating moment in history, and also the boundless heights and depths to which the human soul can extend toward the enormous tasks that await us.
- Soon our paths will part as our second-year students embark on their fieldwork in new and unexpected places at congregations far from here, without our knowing when or where we will meet again.
- But the central reason I find Gauguin's painting about an unknown future so aptly symbolizes our situation is that it is we ourselves who have created these questions, out of our new accomplishment: As we are advancing toward providing a full training on American soil, we have for the first time completed the second year of the priest training at our seminary. Thus, students and teachers alike are all pioneering in some way.

For me personally, the past semester was also the beginning of a completely new life, when I left my homeland the Netherlands and moved to Spring Valley with my wife. We have settled in the upper part of the house that is also home to the seminary, so that we share a good part of our daily life with students, faculty, and visitors.

Happily, I am not alone in this venture. My colleague Gisela Wielki is still working with me, and although she is definitely retreating, step by step, her contributions, matured over ten years of directing seminary life, help steady what could be a uncertain enterprise, uncertain because much of our work is unpredictable.

As for what the coming fall semester will bring us—well—we are just as interested to discover that as you are!

A hand below, a hand above – clasped in my center

## WORD WORKSHOP

In the seminary training students are encouraged to use the word creatively and imaginatively as we consider and describe the natural world and festival seasons. The schooling is not about 'speaking in tongues' but to learn to speak in pictures. It has to do with learning to create a sermon, something the students are beginning to mature towards in the second year of training.

Throughout the newsletter you will encounter a few of those imaginative nature and festival season descriptions.

### **The Star**

*~ Emma Heirman*

If your soul has an eye  
Do your soles have eyes?  
Soul pupils spot that dot of light above  
Learn quickly to stay open, let it come in.  
  
Toes dig in the dirt  
Wiggling, trying to find sole eyes – saying  
Feet! You can feel the ground, but what do you see?  
Who holds me here?  
A hand below, a hand above – clasped in my center.

### **Epiphany**

*~ Lisa Hildreth*

Wondrous star, through you  
Shepherds' hearts open in love and  
Kings come bearing wisdom.  
  
May Christ's grace join love and wisdom  
And through the Father's will unite  
To lead mankind to the higher truth of being.

## “Buddha and Christ” at the House of Peace

~ Emma Heirman

In the month of February, the Seminary students spent one week at the House of Peace in Ipswich, Massachusetts, studying Buddha and Christ with Rev. Julia Polter, of the Christian Community in Boston. John and Carrie Schuchard created the House of Peace, which rests in a nine-bedroom Colonial home, to provide both physical and spiritual refuge for victims of war, while in community with adults with special needs. They have been opening their doors for over 20 years ago and offered us an ideal space to stay and study. They cared for us with the deepest hospitality and we thank them with heartfelt gratitude! It was a full week immersed in the life of the home and in our studies. Here are four brief pictures to give you a window into our experience.

It is cold this early in the morning and snow is on the ground. I leave the house and go into the barn that rises tall behind it. I climb a narrow staircase, open a door, pull back a curtain and find myself in the sanctuary. It is warm inside, someone kindly turned the heat on earlier, and everything is in order: there are ten chairs in two rows, the altar, seven candles, and an altar painting hanging in front of a dark purple backdrop. I sit in the front row with members of the house and friends and wait for the Act of Consecration to begin. I look up at the altar painting – it is new to me – and see the face of the Risen One glowing. Opposite the painting there is a small circular window and the morning sun is streaming in, forming a perfect sphere.

Julia, Lisa and I are in the living room of the House of Peace. Each of us has found a comfortable chair or couch to occupy and though we have plenty of our own space, we face one another. On one side there is a large fireplace and in it burns a fire. Along the walls are houseplants and photographs of the family and friends and many books. It is full with life. Rising between the three of us are tall stacks of books. There is a stack of Steiner books that include themes on Buddha and Christ and there is a stack of more mainstream books about Buddha. There is also a stack of books about the group of Buddhist monks we will meet who are close with the Schuchards and will be traveling through during our stay. The three of us each hold a different book and are busy reading and writing notes. Hanging on the walls are three sheets of flipchart paper, labeled with the titles *Insights*, *Questions*, and *Themes*, respectively. As the pages turn our notes begin to fill the walls. Carrie brings us tea and cookies on a tray.



*Back row Lisa Hildreth, Julia Polter, Carrie Schuchardt,  
front row, Emma Heirman, Geraldine*

It is evening in the House of Peace and the living room glows from lamplight and the fire from the fireplace. There is hardly enough room for all of us sitting in a misshapen circle. The eyes of the people gathered are tired, but many spark with curiosity and

keen interest. We are monks, peace activists, an American Indian healer, a Christian Community priest, seminary students, congregation members and friends. We come to meet one another, to ask questions and to listen.

We walk together to the neighborhood church while the monks and followers chant. The community welcomes us into their gathering space for dinner. A woman with a kind face introduces herself to me, "Have you seen our church?" Telling her no, I had not, she takes me by the hand and leads me down the hall. It is carpeted. We go through two sets of doors and past a courtyard before we stand in front of the sanctuary. The sun is setting and it is dim in the hall. We cannot find any light-switches. The woman opens the door to the Sanctuary and we enter. My mouth opens. "Beautiful." I stand in the center aisle, above me is a high, steepled ceiling and the walls are filled with stained glass windows unlike any I have ever seen. It is dark inside and the warm, faint glow of the setting sun pushes through many small though slightly differently sized rectangular windows, creating a mosaic of muted colors. There are no scenes depicted. It is simply a revelation of light. Like many of our courses at the Seminary, the week we spent immersed in the themes connected to the Buddha and the Christ were a beginning. We closed with many questions we wish to continue to pursue and were still grateful to be full. We were filled with new thoughts and ideas, faces, names and stories, and delicious meals and cups of tea.



### **The Grass** ~ Lisa Hildreth

It is night and the dew lies heavily upon the grass. A mist spreads over the meadow and the grasses bow down their heads towards the earth. As the mist thickens, all vision is lost and even the starlight cannot find its way.

All is still, waiting breathlessly for the change that should come – must come.

At last the dawn, the herald of the day, shows herself on the horizon. In answer, the birds begin to stir and one by one sing their songs of joy. But still the grasses lie heavily. Waiting. Hoping.

The dawn whispers to the wind, "Come, blow across the meadows. Dry the dew which lies like tears upon the grass." And the wind comes, with its freshness, drying the tears in the meadow and chasing the mists away.

When at last the sun rises, in all his golden splendor, the grasses lift their heads and stand upright before him.

## Curriculum Winter - Spring 2013



### January 22-25

The Origins of The Act of Consecration of Man, Bastiaan Baan

### January 28

Going in Search of your own inner sources, Bastiaan Baan

### February 4

The Religious life of the child, lessons, festivals, Gisela Wielki

### February 11 Open Course

At the Dawn of the Consciousness Soul, Karl Fredrickson

### February 18

From Buddha to Christ, Julia Polter, at the House of Peace in Boston

### February 25

The Son of Man, Erk Ludwig

### March 4

Forerunners of the Christ Impulse: David and Elijah, Oliver Steinrueck

### March 11

Synod Week, Gardening with Mac Mead and the Garden program interns

### March 18 Open Course

End-of Life-Decisions: Ethical, Social, and Religious Perspectives  
Hans van Delden, MD, PhD Professor of Medical Ethics, Utrecht University,  
The Netherlands, Rev. Bastiaan Baan

### March 25

Holy Week: The Washing of the Feet and other related topics

### April 1

Vacation

### April 8 Open Course

Spiritual Hygiene and the Healing of the Soul: A Practical Approach.  
Sebastian Lorenz, MD, Germany

### Wednesday 17-19

Walking with your Time, Christine Gruwez, Belgium

### April 22

The Twelve Senses in the Act of Consecration of Man, Bastiaan Baan

### April 29 Open Course

Who is Christian Rosenkreutz? How can one become a student of Christian Rosenkreutz?  
Bastiaan Baan

### May 6

The Twelve and the Thirteenth – Goethe's Fragment: The Mysteries, Gisela Wielki

### May 13

Ascension and Pentecost themes

### June 3 - July 6

Students join the Stuttgart seminary

Weekly Classes, once or twice a week:

Greek, Speech, Eurythmy, the Epistles, Sermon work, Autumn Course, Story Telling, Inner Life with exercises, Occult Science, Gospel of John

## Be Generous, Dear Friend!

~Rev. Gisela Wielki, Seminary Co-Director

Our two second-year seminary students are about to apply what they have learned in the past two years as they prepare to serve as interns in congregations for the coming nine to twelve months. This will be their hands-on learning of how to experience the sacraments with increasing depth, build community, tell children stories and teach them religion lessons, plan and lead conferences with and for young people, comfort the sick and the aging, lead study groups, fully grasp the administrative life of a congregation, and much, much more.

Before we send our two students into these new experiences, we would like them to spend the closing weeks of their spring/summer semester with their counterparts at the seminary in Stuttgart. English is the language accessible to most of the very international group of students who study there, and we want our own students to get to know as many of their cohort as possible— those who are also on the way, who live with the same or similar questions about their journey, and who are also motivated by their deep wish to serve the realization of impulses for the future of the Christian Community.

This portion of the training adds the expenses of travel, housing, and boarding, but it is an indispensable part of preparing our priests for their vocation.

A small circle of faithful supporters of the seminary is ready to grow. If you and your congregation have been nourished by the work offered through an ordained priest, if you have enjoyed receiving our newsletter, and if you have been considering supporting the seminary, please open your purse and your heart to help our circle of donors expand. Can you really think of a worthier investment in the future of the Movement for Religious Renewal? Two thousand households receive this newsletter. If each of you donated just \$25 annually, that would provide us with \$50,000. This amount in addition to the tuition from our small group of students and the Open Course participants would cover most of our operating expenses for an entire year.

Many thanks to all those who have already taken our seminary—*your seminary*—to heart and to hand.

**Please use the enclosed envelope for your check,  
payable to:  
Seminary of The Christian Community  
15 Margetts Road  
Chestnut Ridge, NY 10952**

It is good to have a Heavenly Bride, but the seminary needs an Earthly Bride who helps us provide the riches needed for earthly existence. Thank You!



Lady Poverty, Heavenly Bride of St. Francis  
Re-Imagined by Gisela Wielki

**Easter** ~ by *Emma Heirman*

I saw the goldfinch today, sitting brightly on a brown branch.  
The tree branched under his flinching feathers.  
Feathered in gold, the bird brightened the brown.

Today I saw the goldfinch say, behold what is bold.

### **How does the Act of Consecration of Man speak?**

~ *Emma Heirman*

At the Seminary, we have the privilege of attending the Act of Consecration of Man each morning. Every day presents an opportunity to experience how our different senses are engaged. If we focus on our sense of hearing, one of the ways we experience the Act of Consecration of Man expressing itself is through language. Sounds are shaped into words that are imbued with meaning. The language the service is celebrated in becomes a vessel through which a Being can enter.

We have also had the privilege of hearing the Act of Consecration of Man in many different languages. This experience is particularly rich because not only is the sound experience so different, but with a bit of understanding we can hear nuanced differences of how the Act of Consecration of Man expresses itself. This is no different when learning multiple languages. When speaking a language other than your native tongue, the nature of meaning becomes clearer. If "dog" is "dog", but so is "perro" and "hund", then "dog" is not only "dog". The meaning is no longer the word, but what stands behind the word and shines through the many different words.

Different languages have words and expressions where they shine, where they say things better. When I was learning Spanish, I was with several other English speakers going through the same struggles of learning a new tongue. It was curious to notice that as we acquired more skills, Spanglish became our chosen language; particular words were always spoken in English while others were in Spanish and many were even a combination of English and Spanish. Without consciously deciding, we had agreed that certain words in Spanish said it better. The expression "tener ganas", for example, was new to many of us but it entered our daily conversations immediately because it captured the meaning much more than the English "to feel like". If you are or know a Portuguese speaker then you certainly know the word "saudade". Perhaps the most precious word in the Portuguese language, its usage is almost untranslatable – and it is used all the time! It is a way to express missing someone, the feeling of nostalgia and much more, but with a depth and warmth that we cannot express in English with a single word. Finally, think of Greek, a language that gave us



"logos" – reduced to "word" in English – and nuanced expressions of love through "agape", "phileo" and "eros", for example.

Although we have looked at a few examples of the wonderful gifts languages offer, they are not free of limitations. We often discover these limitations through work with translation, but we find this even living exclusively in English. One of the most prevalent and troublesome limitation is the pronoun. Let's look just at the third person singular form: he, she, and it. He is male, she is female, and it is an object. It can never be a human being. This means that any time we refer to a human being in the third person singular and we do not use the name, we have to refer to gender. What if we do not know the person's gender, or how they identify? What if we wish to speak in general and picking "he" or "she" is inadequate and untrue? Different fields are trying to work around and through this, but every day I hear people stumble over this, including myself.

Languages' unique expressions and their limitations challenge translation work. The Act of Consecration of Man came down through Rudolf Steiner and he gave it a form in German. Hardworking souls have taken up the task to translate it into more than twenty languages. Translation work is never over. There is a group dedicated within the priest circle to carry translation questions. This recognizes that meaning is never static, in its expression and in its true state. While some are committed to looking specifically at the form of the words, many more of us can strive to get to know this form. We can listen to the words and through the words. We can walk an inner path that goes towards the source. This is one way we can come to truly know who speaks through the Act of Consecration of Man.

Imagine the earth spinning in space. You are outside the earth's atmosphere, close enough to see which landmass the sun is shining on. It is Sunday and our easternmost brothers and sisters in the Christian Community have risen to attend the Act of Consecration of Man in New Zealand and Australia. A little longer and sun is over Japan. Can you hear "Christ in you" ringing out in Japanese? The sun continues on its journey over the globe and one by one the Act of Consecration of Man is celebrated in the tongue of the people of the land. Imagine the beings in the spiritual world rejoicing in the beauty of this sacramental wave, all the while holding – being – the archetypes our tongues are revealing.



*Breaking Through: Lisa and Emma.*

## **The Old and New Law in Les Miserables**

~ Lisa Hildreth

Is there a higher authority beyond the letter of the law? Can a deed of love transform a soul who has learned to live in hate? Through grace, can one learn to leave behind the old law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and find the way to brotherhood?

Not knowing the story of Les Miserables, I went to see the latest movie version over the Christmas break and was deeply moved by its Christian themes. There on the screen, I experienced the expression of subjects we have been studying here at the Seminary: the law of the Old Testament and the new law given by Christ to his disciples.

Les Miserables is the story of Jean Valjean, who was imprisoned for 19 years after stealing a loaf of bread to feed a starving child. When he is finally paroled, he is labeled as a dangerous man and is treated by his fellow man as the scum of the earth. On the verge of starvation, Valjean is taken in by a kindly bishop and is fed, given a warm bed, and treated as an honored guest. In desperation, Valjean steals from the church. When caught and dragged back to the church he knows his life is forfeit. But then the miracle of love comes. The bishop tells the officers that he gave the silver to Valjean and gives him not only what he stole, but two more candlesticks. Valjean is free – free to give up his way of hate against a world that hated him, free to struggle to the realization that his life belongs to God. At his lowest point, in his time of total powerlessness, love and grace enter his biography and Valjean begins life again.

When we next meet Jean Valjean, he has a new identity; he is now a prosperous business man and the mayor of a town. He is a man who is known to be fair, kind, and awake to those in need – an expression of a striving Christian. It is then that the past rears its ugly head. An officer from the prison is stationed in his town, a man who follows only the letter of the law and considers it his duty to find and imprison Valjean, who disappeared while on parole. It is then that the interplay between these two ways of living comes into focus.

The officer, Javert, believes "once a thief, always a thief." For him, a fall from God and grace is permanent and deserves the swift punishment of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. He believes that the way of the law is the way of order and light; it is the way of righteousness. Through the law, one knows one's place in the world. For Javert, the letter of the law is the meaning and purpose of his life.

As the story continues, it is clear that Jean Valjean lives by a different law, the new law of Christ. Love and grace have wrought much change in him and his own safety is of no concern when one less fortunate needs his help. It is while saving another that his identity is revealed to the officer. Again he risks himself to save the child of

one of his former employees. This deed brings him much; the love of the small girl, Cosette, gives him a hope and happiness of which he never dared dream. To have an innocent child trust and love him transforms Valjean again.

Repeatedly the officer, Javert, experiences the new man who once was the prisoner Valjean. Yet he sees only the past. Crisis comes when Javert, caught by a group of young men rebelling against the state, is given into the hands of Valjean. Fully expecting Valjean to take revenge, Javert is stunned when Valjean gives him his freedom. Here the story has come full circle; once again we see how a man whose life is forfeit is given, through an act of love, his freedom.

However, Javert is unable to accept this gift and unable to transform through grace. He cannot accept that the way followed by Valjean is actually *more* than the letter of the law. Javert's world view is shattered and an abyss opens before him. Rather than learn to live in this strange new world of love and grace, Javert chooses suicide.

The movie ends with the death of Jean Valjean, an imperfect man who once shown the path of love, strived to walk it. It is a challenging task – to stay awake to this new goal without falling back into the old ways. Stories like *Les Miserables* can help all of us move towards this new way of being.



Saint and Sinner  
Re-imagining the Discarded by Gissela Wielki

*This is the task that I put before you, that you love one another as I have loved you. No man can have greater love than this, that he offers up his life for his friends. John 15 .*

*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Matthew 25*

### Winter Winds

~ Emma Heirman

Wait, weight – where's it come from?

I, my head, she said "gravity"

No, know, "the ground" her feet spoke

Tread, take, snowy steps formed from new winter boots

Emylee, emissary, the name the wind howls

Roar, rip, it sweeps and smudges eyes, nose, lungs – not heart.

When I was younger

I was her mate at sea –

Needing none other than one another.

Did I not hear what the wind was singing?

Sorrow

### Winter Winds

~ Lisa Hildreth

Weeds

In dry fields

Nod

Their heads –

Endless

Rustles

Whisper

In the

Night and

Dream of

Spring

## **The Art of Dying**

*~Janice Mulder Palliative Care Physician, Canada*

This was my first visit to the seminary in Spring Valley. It was great to see Steiner's world view put into action in the Open Course: End-of Life-Decisions: Ethical, Social, and Religious Perspectives. I have worked in the field of palliative care for 17 years. It was wonderful to have a priest, Bastiaan Baan and a Doctor, Hans van Delden, provide us with our teaching. We were challenged to look at end-of-life and palliative care from many different perspectives. One of the highlights for me was our group's reading the lecture by Rudolf Steiner: The Origin of Suffering, Berlin, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1906. It validated the sadness that I feel when I witness people missing precious opportunities for healing during this time of life.

It was wonderful being at the seminary just before Easter. It was good to be reminded that Christ is here now. Having trained in western medicine I came looking for answers. I left having experienced many moments of grace. One such moment was when I we were told; "God has given us freedom. He doesn't expect us to get it right the first time." We were all reminded that by practising the art of dying on a daily basis we will learn the art of living. It was a timely reminder to practise the end of day review.



***Participants of the 'End-of-Life-Decisions' Open Course***



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For Open Courses Fall 2013,  
check our website in late summer  
[www.christiancommunityseminary.org](http://www.christiancommunityseminary.org)