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THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony - A Contemplative Christian Community



CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

by Tim Cook

Exactly 101 years ago, on Christmas Eve 1914, during World War I; an unexpected, unauthorized, unofficial, photographically well-documented, genuine Christmas miracle interrupted the seemingly interminable trench fighting on the Western Front in France. At several locations along the battle lines soldiers from Germany and England spontaneously put down their weapons, climbed out of the safety of their trenches and joined each other in Christmas fellowship by singing carols, sharing cigarettes and cigars, toasting, sharing food, trading souvenirs and even playing a game of soccer. The next day, at their officer's insistence and under threats of court-martial and execution; they resumed their attempts to murder each other. This strange event reveals in its stark simplicity, the deeply divided, love/hate nature of our human species. Hungry for fellowship; yet we can't tame our blinding instinct to fight.

I was born into a world at war; my first Christmas was celebrated during World War II and I'm pretty sure that during all the Christmases since, the world has been at war. Recently, Paris was attacked by terrorists and Pope Francis plainly

stated the obvious, that we are already engaged in a "piecemeal beginning to World War III." The world will undoubtedly be at war this Christmas just as it has been in the past.

Questions naturally arise, what are we to do? How can we stop this madness? The answers to those questions depend on what we mean by the word "we." If the "*we*" we refer to is the human race itself, then we are helpless. There is no power in our possession to alter the powerful currents of violence that sweep away generation after generation in mindless destruction of people, our planetary home and the other life-forms with which we share it. But if, when we use the word "*we*," we make reference to those sisters and brothers in Christ who are on the spiritual journey in every nation, race and tongue, the prospect is very different; and we can be sure of our powerful capacity to bring peace on earth and good-will to men. The Christmas story that was played out on the stage of history over 2000 years ago is a universal story, inviting each individual human person to return to the innocence and love that were our original nature at birth. The birth of the

Christ at Bethlehem changed the human predicament forever by manifesting the means for any one of us to be born again; born from above, born of Spirit. But it changed not for huge groups such as nations or races, but for individuals; for people like those World War I soldiers who disobeyed orders not to consort with the enemy and miraculously loved each other for a day on Christmas 1914.

So just how did the Christ event make it possible to transform a human person from an unwitting participant in the group-consciousness stream of never-ending violence into a participant in the coming of God's Presence into the mind of Earth? Well, it has to do with how we conceive of ourselves. Each of us has a self-image that we've acquired through relationship to our ever-changing environment. These "pictures of self" are a sort of archetypal form that in turn shape the form of our souls and determine the way the world around us reacts to our actions. That form is always a reflection of some version of the world outside of us.

Christ's human birth in Jesus and the patterns revealed in

the unfolding of his life, death, resurrection and ascension give another possibility for us to reflect on and for our souls to take form around. Christ is the Truth of every man, the Universal Man. He has no race or gender. He has no divisions. He is not mad at anybody. Jesus' life is The Life; the Life that is presently living in every one of us. He invites us to share his identity by letting go of our interior divisions that are based on a self-identity that is a reflection of the ever warring outer world. He invites us, through the Sermon on the Mount to live His life, in our own lives since He already lives within us. His Way is the reverse of this warlike world's way of being humans together and it appears, at first, to be absurd. But when He breaks through to us from within, as He did to those cold soldiers at Christmas 1914, we have clear evidence that He is ever waiting to convert us into His image and likeness and actually making it possible for us to participate in the seemingly impossible Way of Christ. The Reality of His presence and action within us empowers us to live the Sermon on the Mount; to interiorly bless those who curse us ... pray for those who spitefully

use us ... go the extra mile ... turn the other cheek ... resist no evil ... agree quickly with our adversary. As our personal soul formation, our personal consciousness is gradually exchanged for Christ's Consciousness; we begin the next phase of our life in God informed by the Mind of Christ.

Jesus was born into our world at a time of great darkness in human consciousness. His birth brought new possibilities to our warring species. But we remain as God creates us, creatures with free-will that cannot be violated. God cannot force us to become Christ-conscious. Instead He invites us,

Come to me all you who labor and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest.

Rest from what? Burdened with what? From the interior wars of judgement, criticism, doubt, fear, agitation, unforgiveness and all the other petty ways that we avoid knowing and experiencing the utterly present and available, right-now love of God.

We are still experiencing a time of great unconsciousness and darkness in the world of human affairs and the stakes are rising by the day. But what is going on in

the world is one thing, yet what is going on within any one of us can be an entirely different matter. We have a choice. We can exchange our worldly consciousness for His consciousness through living our lives like monks in the world; making each day a day of worship and each moment a sacrament.

Yes, there is darkness in the world around us but the light, the consciousness, we long for waits for our discovery that it is already within us, right now, waiting only for our attention and trust to transform us into our own unique expression of the Christ that was born as Jesus on that long-ago first Christmas. An old poem expresses it beautifully, "Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born; until He is born in thee, thy heart remains forlorn."

What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out. (John 1:5 The Message)

The darkened world is waiting for you. ☺

CHRIST IN YOU THIS CHRISTMAS

by Barbara Cook

Our community's beloved friend Bernadette Roberts reminds us that Jesus did not come to reveal God to us. God had already been revealed to humanity through Moses. Jesus came to reveal us to us. Through Christ, we experience our human nature, as eternally united with what God is. This is true for all human nature in and at all times. Through the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, it became possible for anyone who wants to live as Children of Heaven, instead of as their separate lives, to do so, in this life and beyond. I'm also reminded of something else that Bernadette said, "Anybody who wants God can have God." God is universal, democratic and all inclusive. Talk about Good News! In the Book of Acts, Peter says, "God is no respecter of persons." That means the same thing, whether we are educated or not, rich or poor, slave or free, male or female, religious or pagan; if you want God, God is ours. God wants to give Itself to us. Jesus reveals, "All that the Father has is yours." All the wisdom, all the love, all

the generosity, all the freedom is yours, if you want it. Accepting it is usually a slow process, since we are embedded in and informed by a world that does not notice God. So it may take some time to fully manifest our Children of God selves, but if that is what we want, it is ours for the wanting.

Our Church offers us The Work of Inner Christianity that teaches us to observe our mechanical selves, our false selves; to non-identify with them and to remember the Truth that we are Children of God. We are also given access to heaven in the stillness and silence in our daily times of Prayer. Three times each week at The Church, we are offered the Eucharist; in which Christ feeds the Christ in us with transformative food. We have a community that is pointed in the direction of Christ to provide encouragement and support. We have elders on the Way to serve as trusted guides. We offer Centering Prayer retreats with prolonged time in silence and communion with the Beloved for our transformation and for deeper intimacy with God. We have been

given everything. To receive it, the only thing we have to bring is our wish for God. And if we don't have that; we can pray for it, "Help me Lord I wish to want **you.**"

This Christmas let us praise the event that happened over 2000 years ago that made our sonship available to all humanity. When we make out our Christmas wish list, let's be sure we wish most of all to live in the Kingdom of God here on earth and beyond. Let us certainly celebrate the Babe born in Bethlehem, but also to celebrate the birth of Christ in you, your hope of Glory. Can you imagine a world inhabited by the sons and daughters of God? Well, I can!

Merry Christmas and peace on earth to men of good will. ☸

TO BE

Just to be is a blessing.
Just to live is holy.

Abraham Joshua Heschel,
I Asked for Wonder,
page 65.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

THE SELF

KNOW THYSELF

As we were invited to join in community to move ever deeper together in this annual aim, our intention has been to *Know Thyself* and clearly see God within ... in the light of the eye of the Spirit.

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| January | Self-Awareness |
| February | Self-Observation |
| March | Self-Surrender |
| April | Detaching of Self |
| May | Self-Forgetting |
| June | Letting Go of Self-Reflection |
| July | Self-Giving |
| August | Herenow |
| September | Loving Humans in a Human Way |
| October | Self-Remembering |
| November | The New Man |
| December | Thy Will Be Done |

*All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory,
as from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

Previous issues of *The Mark* are available at consciusharmony.org/read-listen/the-mark if you would like to review and reflect on these monthly community aims. Each issue is dedicated to the monthly topic. May you continue to go ever deeper in your journey to Know Thyself.



CCH BOOKSTORE

Advent Community Reading



*Advent and Christmas
Wisdom from
St. Francis of Assisi*
Compiled by John V. Kruse

Other suggested books...



And the Word Was Made Flesh
by Thomas Keating



Contact with God
by Anthony de Mello



*Advent and Christmas
Wisdom from St. Benedict*
by Judith Sutera

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



ANNUAL AIM: THE SELF

KNOW THYSELF

All of us ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. 2 Corinthians 3:18

THY WILL BE DONE by Tracey Leigh

Lord, have mercy.
Guide me,
make me want again to be holy,
to be a [wo]man of God ...
I do not necessarily ask for
clarity,
a plain way, but only to go
according to your love,
to follow your mercy,
to trust in your mercy.
I want to seek nothing at all,
if this is possible.
But only to be led
without looking and
without seeking.

Thomas Merton,
A Year with Thomas Merton,
Daily Meditations from His Journals

I wish give *real* Christmas
present. Imagine Christ.
Somewhere in space *is*.
[Mr. Gurdjieff forms an oval
with both his hands.]
Make contact. Not to center, but
to outside, periphery.
Draw from there, draw in, *I*.
Settle in you, *Am*.
Do every day.
Wish to become Christ.
Become. Be.

G. I. Gurdjieff, Christmas 1948

*He has made known to us the mystery of His will ...
that He set forth in Him as a plan for the fullness of time,
to sum up all things in Christ.*

Ephesians 1:9

The purpose of this reflection is in service of the wish to reduce violence in man and the world. Is that part of Thy Will Be Done? I hope so and may it begin with me.

The experience of Thy Will Be Done is often acknowledged in retrospect, is utterly spontaneous, and can ultimately become an ongoing, working, life understanding of “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be...” Thy Will Be Done is “the Living Word” as we so often hear. It is the experience of “Eternal Life.” As Mary responded to the angel Gabriel,

*...may it be done to me according
to your word. Luke 1:38*

Acknowledged in Retrospect

As I reflect back, Thy Will Be Done began for me in utero as a fetus. In the same way my mother and her mother and all the generations that came before us, I was being programmed neurophysically (think of it as brain chemistry wiring and full body neuro pathways) with what I call The Five Lies, which are discussed later. After birth I became an infant who sucked the middle fingers of her right hand almost incessantly. Shortly thereafter, as a toddler, I began unraveling clothes; shredding hems of t-shirts, pulling elastic out of socks and under clothes, all while sucking my fingers and playing. It was the same

thing at bedtime, sucking fingers and unraveling the satin edges of blankets. An obsessive compulsive diagnosis was either not yet popular or eluded my parents. Instead my hands were slapped, slapped out of my mouth, gloved, taped and doused with Thumb, an ointment that was very hot once in the mouth. Verbal comments like “You are costing us a fortune;” “If you would only act right this family would be much better off;” and “You are driving me nuts!” ensued. The finger sucking and unraveling, though lessened by day with a busy active life, persisted all the way through high school. As shocking as it sounds, I clearly remember finishing a math test as a senior in high school and going back to my desk to pick up the ravels that were under my desk on the floor.

It all stopped the spring semester of my freshman year in college when I began spending more time with a boyfriend who was very affectionate. Through our closeness, touching and cuddling, the finger sucking and unraveling stopped. I didn’t do anything except notice sometime later that the addictive, self-calming behaviors had disappeared, never to return. How curious. Or perhaps how obvious! Touch was, and is, a big part of what God had planned in my life. In retrospect, Thy Will was being done the whole time. It seemed as if I was meant to bear much. But, thank God, things were

easing up! Or were they?

During my last year in college, I had become deeply depressed, primarily from many years of recreational drug and alcohol use. Thankfully, I ran into a beautiful girl I knew from one of my classes and asked her how she always managed to be so happy. I still remember feeling the shock of what she said, “I learned to meditate.” I wanted what she had—so without much hesitation, I went where she went to learn to meditate. The meditation teachers told me that they would instruct only after two weeks of no drugs or alcohol. All marijuana and alcohol use came to a screeching halt; and I learned to sit in silence. Yes God; Thy Will Be Done.

Life was good. I got married and was blessed with two children. However six years into the marriage, God’s Will sent us a rough patch. While my husband was in rehab for an addiction, I discovered that he had shared needles and sex with random people. Yikes, God! Really? It became necessary, since I was still nursing my son and had been intimate with my husband, to be checked for HIV/AIDS. Both my son and I were at risk. After two years of semi-annual examinations, we were cleared. Yes, it was all God’s Will, although a very scary and dangerous experience.

Blessed with two children and a divorce, I married husband number

two about five years later. A year into our marriage, he became enamored with internet porn and started seeking sensual massages. This was a world of which I had no understanding and yet became a quick study. As part of God’s plan, we lived less than a mile from a massage school. So through Divine inspiration, I figured if I became a massage therapist, he could just get the massages from me. It was definitely Divinely-inspired, even the part where I came home from massage school one day unexpectedly to find him with another woman. The long and short of it is I became a massage therapist, which was never on my five-year plan until this time in my life; and became divorced for a second time, which also was never my wish to be divorced once much less twice. To reflect back from my childhood anxieties to the college boyfriend who gave me so much touch to overcoming my childish self-calming habits to mastering the art of soothing touch and becoming a massage therapist. All God’s Will? Absolutely!

It’s miraculous that the hands of shame have become the hands of comfort, helping people of all ages feel better and more connected to their bodies. I get to be an agent of incarnation.

Utterly Spontaneous

As I mentioned earlier, Thy Will

Be Done can be utterly spontaneous. One day while I was talking with a friend, a completely unforeseen idea popped in my head and rolled off my tongue as if I had received a divine download. The idea of The Five Lies just happened like a songwriter being inspired to write words to a song. I believe that I, we, and humanity for a very, very longtime have been programmed in utero and to some degree reinforced by life experiences with The Five Lies, which are:

There is something wrong with me.
I am not good enough.
It's going to be bad.
It's going to hurt.
I am going to be alone.

In my opinion, The Five Lies are the painful intellectual, emotional and physical programming that results in the violence of the human condition, humanity and the world. These lies negatively control us—and more often than not, we aren't able to see this as true. Most, if not all of us, tend to habitually avoid seeing how these lies run us in all three centers, intellectual thoughts, feelings and emotions, and physical sensations. It is much easier (or conditional) to make it about others and the circumstances both past and present. We believe there is something wrong with us, we're not good enough, etc. There is something wrong with this marriage, job, government, etc. They're not good enough. It's going to be bad. It's going to hurt. We are

going to end up alone, unwanted, unloved; and so on. We do this over and over, all day, every day. It's the basis of all my painful recurrences.

The spiritual journey has taken me, to the best of my ability and with the grace of God, to seek freedom and not live in bondage to one or any of these lies. Yet the hallmark of all addictions and behaviors (consider our addictions to thoughts and emotions) is *avoidance*. How many times have I avoided seeing the painful violent programming in myself? It is at the core of all distress. If I am upset in any way, it's because I am identified and believing in a lie. It is violence large and small, overt and subtle that I perpetuate on myself and others. Yet when I remember that God is in everything, I can welcome the physical sensations, saying inside, "I can feel this; this is a body having these sensations; God is and all is well."

I had a girlfriend call me one time crying out, "What's wrong with me?" I said, "Nothing." It is metanoia, a change in the direction where we're looking for happiness. Seeing the lie as a lie allows for the Divine Light of Truth to shine.

Becoming the "Living Word," living eternal life nanosecond by nanosecond, downloading the Divine programming has transformed The Five Lies into:

There is nothing wrong with me.
I am good enough.
Nothing bad is happening.

Nothing hurts.
I am never alone.

Likewise, I've learned there is nothing wrong with you, me or this situation. It or they or this is good enough. Things are happening in the only way they can. God is and all is well; we are never alone.

An Ongoing Life Understanding

It has been my experience in living a completely sober and contemplative life that by sitting in silence twice a day in Centering Prayer, spiritual study, the Work of Inner Christianity, and particularly the application of the Welcoming Prayer (for the other 23 hours when not in Centering Prayer), is the way of metanoia. The process, or the spiritual journey, is a twofer. The painful violent programming is diminished and the Divine downloads the Truth. I live more fully in the inspiration of Philippians 4:8,

*whatever is honest ...
whatever is pure ...
think on these ...*

I close with this prayer recently shared in the Welcoming Prayer class:

For all that has been ... Thank you.
For all that is ... Welcome.
For all that will be ... Yes.

Thy Will Be Done. Amen. 

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work
Open Mind, Open Heart,
lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.

Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according
to the method of Lectio Divina.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

17TH GUIDELINE



The experience of being loved by God
enables us to accept our false self as it is,
and then to let go of it and journey to our true Self.
The inward journey to our true Self is the way to divine love.

SEEDS

The real purpose of meditation is this:
to teach a man how to work himself free
of created things and temporal concerns,
in which he finds only confusion and sorrow,
and enter into a conscious and loving contact with God
in which he is disposed to receive from God
the help he knows he needs so badly,
and to pay to God the praise and honor
and thanksgiving and love
which it has now become his joy to give.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pages 217-218.



**THE CHURCH of
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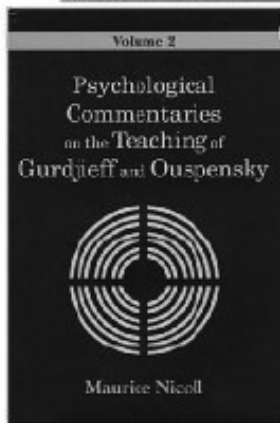
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THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

LET THERE BE LIGHT

It is said in Isaiah, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (1:2) and in John, “The light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.” (1:5) which means that esoteric teaching represented in Christ came as light to those in darkness of mind and understanding. ... There is no “love of neighbour” ... in Work terms, there is no power of sincere external considering, no ability to put oneself genuinely in the position of another person and to think and feel as he or she thinks and feels, unless it belongs to one’s own self-interest and the personal sphere of one’s own merit. This is the general state of Man. In the Work it is necessary to get beyond this state and it is very difficult to do so for everyone, without exception. However, it is necessary ... for the step that has to be taken is *beyond what one is* at present. The first requisite is a *shock* administered to one’s present state of mind and feeling. One must begin to think differently and then to feel in a new

way. But unless one meets with something that makes this possible, it will remain a step not taken. So one will continue to sound the same *note* all one’s life—as most people do.

... In Genesis the idea that Man is a self-developing organism is contained in the very first line, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”—that is, two levels a higher and a lower. This refers to the dead Man for it then says, “And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.” The man is dead in himself—yet he has been created by God having a heaven as well as an earth in him. That is, although dead, he has the possibility of development, first in relation to “earth” and then to “heaven.” The outer side of a man is his “earth” and the inner is his “heaven.” For a “dead” man to change, his earth must be developed and planted, but first he must be given *light*. So it goes on to say, “And God said, Let there be light.” This is the

first stage of the dead beginning to become alive ... this awakening man eventually reaches the state of being an image of God. On the sixth day “God created Man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.” All that precedes this refers to Man rising from the “dead” and to the stages leading to his becoming an “image of God.” ... Now on the seventh day another man is apparently created. (cf. Ch. 2) Of this man it is said that “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and Man became a “living soul.” Here we have a man in contact with God. He is not merely an imitation or image of God but actually a living soul in contact with the breath or spirit of God.

... The highest category of Man in this system is called No. 7 Man. He is said to be a man whose knowledge and being are both at their highest level and so equal, so that all his resultant understanding is practical. This means, for one thing, that there is nothing that he *knows* that he cannot *do*. This

MYSTERIES

Mysteries are not dark shadows, before which we must shut our eyes and be silent. On the contrary, they are dazzling splendours, with which we ought to sate our gaze, whilst recognizing, however, that they extend far beyond its capacity, and that our eyes cannot bear their full radiance. It is in contemplating them, in speaking of them, that we dispose ourselves to be given even here below as much of them as God sees fit to impart to us, and to receive one day that fullness of light which will be the essence of our beatitude.

A Carthusian, *They Speak by Silences*, pages 23.

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT AT CEDARBRAKE


Jan 20-24 5-day Renewal
\$425 (double room) \$485 (single room)

“A multi-day retreat is the best thing you can do for yourself—your “true” self, that is. The only thing it does for the “false” self is gently wear it away bit by bit, and that’s a good thing. Try it and see.” ~Bob K.

Contact 512.347.9673 or officemgr@consciousharmony.org to register.

The Work continued from page 10

unity of knowledge, being and understanding belongs only to No. 7 Man ... we see at once that such men must belong to another world, psychologically. ... No. 7 Man is in touch with higher centres. In Genesis, this last created Man who has a “living soul” is in touch with God.

... To begin to awaken, a man must meet esotericism and its force and its ideas and its viewpoints. This is light. 

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 403-406. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

7-Day Advent Retreat at Cedarbrake
Dec 4-Dec 10
Preregister in the office or call 512.347.9673

One-Day Centering Prayer
Dec 12 8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a potluck dish to share

The Glorious Impossible play
Dec 17 7 pm

Christmas Eve Service
Dec 24 6-7 pm

Holiday - Office Closed
Dec 25, 28-31

New Year's Eve Service
Dec 31 8:30 pm - Jan 1 12:30 am

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music
Dec 15 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9 am
Worship Service 10-11:30 am
Youth Program 10-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays
Prayer Circle 9:15-10 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am
Centering Prayer Service
in Theosis Chapel

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*In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel
was sent from God to a town of
Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed
to a man named Joseph,
of the house of David,
and the virgin's name was Mary.
And coming to her, he said,
Hail, favored one!
The Lord is with you.'*
Luke 1:26-28

THE GRACE OF CHRISTMAS

Mary's expectation of her vocation was shattered in an instant
... The shattering of our vision of life – the disappointments,
the heartbreaks, rejection, loneliness, confusion – these things
are part of the preparation for a greater vocation.

Our personal history becomes sacred history.

God never takes anything away without giving us something better.

Sacred history is about how God prepared His people
in order to give them the fullness of grace in Christ.

If we come to the Christmas graces with this open heart and
open mind, the grace of Christ is transmitted to us personally,
enabling us to experience what the liturgy calls 'the gifts of Christmas.'

As we pray for these gifts, we realize that these words point to the life
of Christ welling up within us and giving us the strength
to make all our activity an act of divine love

My one activity is love (John of the Cross).

The divine life within us is teaching us not only how
to receive but how to give.

Thomas Keating, *Rearwakenings*

