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## **Thin Places in the Midst of a Thick World . . .** by Rev. Dr. Sarah Henrich

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I have a strange tale to tell of how and where a thin place opened to me. So often I have thought of thin places—occasions of increased transparency—in ways reminiscent of the story in *Luke's* gospel when Jesus, raised from the dead, meets Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus. They walk together; they tell Jesus their story, which is about him, ironically; they study scripture with him. Still they do not know him. Their eyes are “wide shut” out of grief and dashed hopes. The world has grown thick. But when Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, they know him instantly.

These are thin places, I had thought. Such sudden, unexpected moments of knowing or of recalling fire in our hearts. Moments in which we are “surprised by joy,” as C. S. Lewis once wrote. My story is of a thin place that did surprise, but it was a moment in which I was surprised by the deep, sober nature of God's call. It was less about joy than about clarity and acceptance. Or perhaps about a quiet calm that clarity and acceptance can bring.

An ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, published by the Spiritual Growth Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church

I have long been a teacher. Even after all these years, the start of school at the seminary is still a thin place for me. Every September is a brand new beginning where teachers and students begin to take things apart—Greek sentences, for instance, and unexamined ideas about God. And in September all sorts of things come together—syllabus planning, summer reading, and all kinds of experiences in the wider world of arts and sciences, politics and play. In the coming apart and the bringing together, there are open places for me, places where curiosity and energy are engaged in the sheer, unadulterated miracle of re-discovery of God at the heart of all this creation. We make and imagine a world together in seminary because God's own Holy Spirit has granted us a glimpse of shalom and energized us to care.

I love my work, my calling, and am grateful to share the thin places of learning with so many people. Because tenured professors cannot be fired unless they commit a serious error, I have relished the security to seek to serve well, to write, to keep learning, to teach outside the box, to think aloud about how God is alive in the world and about where God is calling us.

But this past winter I experienced a different aspect of tenure. Many of my colleagues and I found ourselves in a very thick place. In the midst of economic stringencies, navigating treacherous currents of disagreement about institutional priorities, ground down by a number

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**WESTMINSTER**  
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[www.eWestminster.org](http://www.eWestminster.org)

Look for *Thin Places* at: [www.thinplaces.us](http://www.thinplaces.us) or [www.eWestminster.org/thin\\_places](http://www.eWestminster.org/thin_places)

of what seemed like ill-considered dismissals that left a beloved institution bereft of good leadership, I realized that for some time I had been wearily retreating to my office and slowly disengaging from my community.

**"Prayer and love are learned in the hour  
when prayer becomes impossible,  
and hearts have turned to stone."**

Thomas Merton

It had been a downward spiral for me. Pulling away from community activities and even chapel, because "I had too much work to do," had cut me off from the very nourishment I needed to work. And I had realized that many of my colleagues had also begun to disappear from community life: immured in their offices, teaching in other places, off writing papers. We were not together creating the community that is the bedrock of any educational adventure. And I began to hear myself saying internally, "I'm done." "I need a different job." "I can't do this anymore."

Perhaps the truth is that the gift of a thin place sometimes emerges under pressure, like living streams of fiery lava under layers and layers of rock. For in this thick place of nowhere to go, no future but endurance, it came to me with unwanted and indisputable clarity that my eyes had been "wide shut," that tenure was a call . . . a call entrusted to me by an institution and faculty for the sake of the well-being of that institution and faculty. And like any call, my tenure meant not only that I got to seek to be truthful and curious in my own teaching and research about the way God is at work in the world, but that I was obligated to those who called me for exactly that seeking and expressing of the truth for the sake of our community itself.

In the midst of that wretchedly opaque world of putting one foot in front of another until cynicism, indifference, and lethargy would wreak irreparable damage in the community, a tough, unwelcome thin place opened up. And I knew beyond any doubt that God had called me into a different way of being and was holding me to that

calling, like it or not. I wept as it became clear to me that not less but more investment in my community was required, more careful formulation of griefs and hopes and clearer goals for change, less certainty about the correctness of my own opinions, more openness to others. Tenure turned out to be a thin place where my colleagues and I were held for the work God was calling us to do.

This experience of being awakened, of having my eyes opened, was a sobering thin place where many difficult decisions had to be made and many long-hidden angers acknowledged. I was not surprised by any ordinary joy, but somehow I felt I was in a better place. Not an easy place, but a place in which there was a quiet sense of greater purpose and meaning. And perhaps a place in which there was a quieter and longer-lasting joy.

Perhaps it is joy enough to be recalled to Scripture's promises that our work belongs to God and to God's people. Really. I truly believe that God alone is able—fully and always—to invest Godself among people where God is neither sought nor welcomed. Those dark days of Jesus' ministry were precisely the thin places of his relationship with God. In the dark times, the thick places of this world, he did not have the option of being indifferent, of turning his back, of not caring anymore. I am not Jesus, but I am a daughter of God, part of Christ's body, granted the sweet, sobering awareness of God's call to abide in love with my sisters and brothers, especially when thin places seem to have gone dark and God seems to have vanished.

"Tenure" is often associated with academic life (as I have been using it here). But in its primary—and more important—meaning it is applicable to us all. Each of us has been granted the tenure of our life here on earth and with it the opportunity to seek and to follow God's call, a call that is offered to each of us.

"Tenure" comes from the Latin for "to hold" and is God's gift to all of us . . . creating the security for us to hold on to our calling . . . even when it feels most burdensome. Can this be joy?

*Sarah Henrich, an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has been teaching New Testament at Luther Seminary for eighteen years. She is a docent at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and has recently completed work for an MA in Art History at St. Thomas University. Her bone-deep curiosity about nearly everything has been nourished by on-going learning. She is an avid quilter as well. She may be reached at: shenrich@luthersem.edu.*

**Do you know of anyone who might like to receive  
*Thin Places?*** (It's sent free to all who request it.)

**Or do you know of an up-coming Opportunity  
that might be of interest to others?**

If 'yes' to either, please contact Kathy Fisher at:  
**kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.**

### The Episcopal House of Prayer

Humanity has gone through major shifts in consciousness nearly every 500 years, when evolving understandings of what is true and what is false emerge in a newly shared awareness. In our own day we see human separation as a pernicious evil. The call for oneness and wholeness was the urgent prayer of the 20th century. After Vatican II, this desire and understanding has become foremost, especially among Christians, with a deep longing to become “one” as the Body of Christ.

This longing was exemplified in the vision and the building of The Episcopal House of Prayer on the grounds of St. John’s Benedictine Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. The House of Prayer stands out as a monument to the emerging work of repairing the great rifts within humanity.

Since its dedication in 1990, The House of Prayer has sought through contemplative prayer to be a place of transcendent unity between creation and the Divine. Based on the teachings of mystics and wisdom teachers, we seek the practices that transform human consciousness. Our grounds and buildings, and especially our Oratory—built by the renowned architect John Cunningham—embody in their beauty, tranquility and simplicity the transcendence we seek.

While at the outset people came to simply get away to listen to that still, small voice, our vision has expanded to include weekend and week-long Wisdom Schools and intensive retreats. These retreats focus on those practices and methods given by Jesus and by many other wisdom teachers which help to diminish the ego that divides us and judges others.

**The House of Prayer in the City**—since its opening in the Twin Cities in the Spring of 2006—offers Ongoing and One-Time Opportunities that complement what we offer in Collegeville . . . in a closer and more convenient location for many.

To learn more, to discover our many programs, or to book a retreat: [www.ehouseofprayer.org](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org).

“If you are seeking, do not stop until you find.”

### At The House of Prayer in the City: Contemplative Practice

Silent prayer in a Christian setting. The format includes simple chanting and two 20-minute sits with a walking meditation between. Any type of silent meditation or contemplative practice is welcome. For those who may be beginners in Christian Contemplation, we offer support at teaching before hand, at 6:00 p.m..

Everyone is welcome—especially seekers:

**Every Monday, 6:30-7:30 p.m.**

also:

**A Monthly Contemplative Eucharist . . .**

for those desiring an alternative rite that includes chant, silence, reflection, the prayerful attention to the Presence of God, and the sharing of the common bread and cup. All are welcome:

**Sunday, December 12, 5:30-6:30 p.m. (Please call for 2011 monthly Contemplative Eucharist dates)**

The House of Prayer in the City  
825 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis  
and

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville, MN  
For information for both locations: 320.363.3293 or  
[houseprayer@csbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@csbsju.edu) or [www.ehouseofprayer.org](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org)  
or [www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopcacity.html](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopcacity.html).

**Taizé Worship, a time apart . . .**

**a time for prayer, community and silence**

Our Taizé Prayer is modeled after the daily Prayers of the Taizé Community in France, where over 100 brothers from Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic

### “The Collar”

**George Herbert**, a Church of England priest serving in a small parish near Salisbury in the early 1600s, in Shakespeare’s time, felt his world becoming a thick place around him, felt that his clerical collar had become a real collar, restraining and frustrating him at every turn.

But suddenly . . . in the midst of a growing, fist-pounding anger and frustration . . . he received the calming gift of a thin place.

**“I struck the board [altar, communion table?]  
and cried, ‘No more. I will abroad!’**

**What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free, free as the road,  
loose as the wind, as large as store.  
Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn? . . .**

**Away; take heed: I will abroad.  
Call in thy death’s head there; tie up thy fears.  
He that forbears  
to suit and serve his need,  
deserves his load!’**

**But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild  
at every word,  
me thoughts I head one calling, ‘Child!’  
and I replied, ‘My Lord.’”**

traditions live and work . . . and come together to pray in the Church of Reconciliation three times each day.

Our hope is that our Prayer, like those offered at Taizé, may serve as a parable of community and a sign of hope to the world. All are invited to join us for sung prayer, Scripture and silence:

**Every 2nd Friday, Dec. 10, Jan. 14 . . . 7:00-8:00 p.m.**

Minnehaha United Methodist Church  
3701 East 50th Street, Minneapolis  
For information: 612.721.6231 or  
dianelenge5616@msn.com.

also:

**Wednesday, December 1, 7:00-8:00 p.m.**

St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church  
1500 Franklin Avenue SE, Minneapolis  
For information about this or the 2011 dates of our  
Wednesday evening ecumenical Taizé Prayers (to be  
offered with Prospect Park United Methodist Church):  
612.339.3023 or chris@cabrinimn.org or  
612.378.2380.

### **Advent Evening Prayer: Longing for Light**

As this First Season of the Church Year begins, you are invited to take some time apart for Seasonal Readings, for Quiet, for Music with Local Musicians. All are welcome. Come as you are:

**Mondays: Nov. 29, Dec. 3, 13, 20 - 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.**

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Ave. South, Minneapolis  
For information: 612.822.2623.

### **Faith in Books: Books to Open your Faith and Light your Mind**

This is a new website—being developed by a Twin Cities area clergy person—where you can browse through a selection of books which have been hand-picked for their quality and their appeal to 21st century Christians. Find reviews of recent books by Cynthia Bourgeault, Karen Armstrong, Richard Rohr, John O'Donohue, and more: Click on: [www.faithinbooks.com](http://www.faithinbooks.com).

### **Oasis of Wisdom**

David Keller, the Founding Warden of The House of Prayer, and Emily Wilmer, formerly at Loyola Spirituality Center, have established a website offering daily wisdom from the early Christian desert mothers and fathers, current programming, monthly guidance in prayer, and thoughts and reflections by both David and Emily:

Click on: [www.oasisofwisdom.net](http://www.oasisofwisdom.net)

### **A Christmas Celtic Evening Prayer**

This evening's service—which is normally the high point of the annual cycle of Celtic Evening Prayers that take place on the **Second Thursday** of each month—will include traditional Celtic music on authentic Celtic instruments and Christmas readings from Scripture, with time for silence and meditation, and for prayer.

It will end with all of us encircling the Chapel with candlelight, a powerful way to see and experience the circle of the community of believers. There will be a time for fellowship afterwards:

**Thursday, December 9, 7:00-8:00 p.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis  
Information: 612.322.3421 or [kfisher@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:kfisher@wpc-mpls.org).

### **Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina**

Advent is a time of quiet, faithful waiting for the Lord. Centering Prayer is a simple form of silent prayer in which we become still before Our God, who swells within us. In Centering Prayer we learn how to empty ourselves so that we can become a "Christmas manger" that joyfully welcomes Jesus. Our practice of *Lectio Divina* will focus on scripture readings for the season of Advent:

**Wednesday, December 1, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

Christ the King Retreat Center  
621 First Avenue South, Buffalo, MN  
For information or registration for these or other  
upcoming opportunities: 763.682.1394 or [www.kingshouse.com](http://www.kingshouse.com) or [christheking@kingshouse.com](mailto:christheking@kingshouse.com).

### **Where Are We Going?**

#### **Advent Labyrinth Journeys with Mary**

In a time of year often hurried and harried, this three-hour mini-retreat answers the longing for balance and

#### **Two Wolves**

**"One evening an old Mohawk told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, 'My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.**

**'One is Dark—it is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, resentment, inferiority, false pride, and ego.**

**'The other is Good—it is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, truth, compassion and faith.'**

**The grandson thought about it for a while and asked his grandfather: 'Which wolf wins?' The old man simply replied, 'The one you feed.'"**

A Native American Legend, Origin Unknown

focus. Jill Geoffrion will lead an afternoon of contemplation with images of Mary in the Chartres Cathedral, labyrinth prayer, and *lectio divina*, opening participants to the spiritual call of the advent season.

The deep, often unexplored, relationship between Mary and the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth will orient us. And the labyrinth we walk will be a canvas replica of the Chartres labyrinth design:

**Sunday, December 5, 2:00-5:00 p.m.**

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church  
511 Groveland Avenue, Minneapolis

**Co-sponsored** by Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality  
For information or registration for this or other upcoming opportunities: [wisdomways@csjstpaul.org](mailto:wisdomways@csjstpaul.org) or 651.696.2788 or [www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org).

**Kathleen Norris, “Seeking Fidelity in Everyday Life: Acedia and Beyond”**

When we have asked those who attended our *Faith & Work Breakfast Series* in past years what the greatest challenge is to their own lives, the great majority respond, “balance.” In this year’s series we’ll explore practices and tools to help you achieve a more integrated life of faith.

**Kathleen Norris** will address the difficulty of maintaining our meaningful relationships, including our relationship with God. “Acedia”—an ancient term for listlessness and inability to care—is our enemy in the endeavor, but Acedia can be faced and resisted:

**Thursday, December 9, 7:00-8:30 a.m.**

St. Olaf Catholic Church, 215 South 8th Street, Mpls.  
For information or registration: 612.332.7471 or [sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com](mailto:sr.joan.tuberty@juno.com).

**An Advent Retreat, “The Parables of Jesus”**

All will be warmly welcomed as they gather in the new Guesthouse on the beautiful, forested, snow-covered grounds of St. John’s Abbey for a quiet weekend away, as Abbot John Klassen explores “The Parables of Jesus”:

**Fri., Dec. 10, at 5:30 p.m.-Sun., Dec. 12, at 1:00 p.m.**

St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, MN  
For information or registration for this or other upcoming opportunities: 320.363.3929 or [spiritalife@osb.org](mailto:spiritalife@osb.org) or [www.abbeyguesthouse.org/retreats](http://www.abbeyguesthouse.org/retreats).

**Pilgrimage of Imagination:**

**Seasons of Advent through Easter, 2010-2011**

*Preparation . . . Birth . . . Passion . . . Joy . . .*

These four words name important human experiences. So what happens when these human experiences are touched by the Spirit of God? Join us for one or all of these mini-retreats as we prayerfully consider the story of Jesus. Scripture, music, art, and the gift of imagination:

**Christmas Quiet: Tuesday, Dec. 14, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

**Lent: Monday, March 28th, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

**Beyond: Monday, May 2, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation, Lino Lakes  
For information or registration for these and other upcoming opportunities: [www.christoscenter.org](http://www.christoscenter.org) or 651.653.8207 or [Janetchristoscenter@msn.com](mailto:Janetchristoscenter@msn.com).

**A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols**

This is a traditional Christmas carol service, based on that offered at King’s College, Cambridge, England, on Christmas Eve afternoon each year. During the service—through Scripture and carols—we are reminded of God’s loving purposes, from the first days of our creation to the glory of the Incarnation, the birth of the Christ Child. Childcare is available at both services:

**Friday, December 17, 7:30-9:00 p.m., and**

**Sunday, December 19, 5:00-6:00 p.m.**

St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral, 519 Oak Grove St., Mpls.  
For information on this, our Thursday morning Contemplative Prayer & other upcoming opportunities: 612.870.7800 or [www.ourcathedral.org](http://www.ourcathedral.org).

**Crossing the Threshold**

Life is a pilgrimage, a journey toward the sacred center of the heart. This year’s retreat will use the meditative practice of *visio divina* to explore Chapter 37 of the prophet Ezekiel in which he describes the valley of the dry bones. We will have an opportunity to reflect on the dry bones in our lives and how the breath of God moves us toward an expression of hope.

For *visio divina*, this retreat will draw on an

“The life of faith . . .

is less about taking a big leap of faith than it is about putting one faithless foot in front of the other. And doing it again and again. What happens as you walk that way is sometimes transformed by grace. . . .

And the life of prayer [works] in the same way as the life of faith. A person learns how to pray best by simply doing it, and doing it again, and again.

It is good to read about prayer or to read about saints and deeply spiritual persons, but the best thing we can do is simply pray. By submitting ourselves to God through our prayers, we will find how God works through us and through our prayers.

That is not a deep insight, just common sense.”

Parker Palmer, from “Taking Pen in Hand,” in *Christian Century*, 7 September 2010

illumination from the Saint John's Bible to guide one's imagination into the Word of God:

**Fri., Dec. 31, at 3:00 p.m.- Sat., Jan. 1, at 10:00 a.m.**

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery  
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or registration for this or other opportunities: [www.stpaulsmonastery.org](http://www.stpaulsmonastery.org) or 651.777.7251 or [benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org](mailto:benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org).

### Deepening Contemplative Leadership

This offering is for those who are ready to honor the Spirit's call to deepen and expand contemplative leadership in all of life and is designed intentionally for Shalem Program Graduates. Its intent is to:

- encourage more trusting, risk-taking, Spirit-led leadership,
- to go "deep and wide" in the world, for the transformation of the world, and
- to support the commitment to radical transformation that has been growing within.

Participants will select an area of focus in a work, family or community setting to practice this way of leading from within. It will be supported by prayer partners, small groups, and two sessions with a Shalem staff member:

**Registration deadline, January 4, 2011**

**Opening retreat, Jan. 22 - Closing retreat, June 4**

(with monthly gatherings in between)

Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation

3025 Fourth Street NE, Suite 22, Washington, D.C.

For information or registration for "Deepening Spiritual Leadership," for Shalem's "School of Prayer" and "Quiet Days," or for its many other day-long and weekend opportunities: 301.897.7334 or [www.shalem.org](http://www.shalem.org).

**"I hope you have met . . .**

**or will meet at least one Kingdom person in your life. They are surrendered and trustful people. You sense that their life is okay at the core. They have given control to Another and are at peace, which paradoxically allows them to calmly be in control. A Kingdom person lives for what matters, for life in its deepest and lasting sense. There's a kind of gentle absolutism about their life-style, an inner freedom.**

**Kingdom people are anchored by their awareness of God's love deep within them and deep within everyone else too. They happily live on a level playing field, where even God has come to 'pitch his tent' (the literal translation of John 1:14)."**

Richard Rohr, *Jesus' Plan for a new World*

### Reflections on the Patchwork of our Lives:

*A Quilters' Retreat.* Patchwork quilts are symbolic of the many pieces, threads, patterns, designs and textures that make up the fabric of our lives. This retreat will explore the concept of quilting as an expression of our faith.

Participants are invited to bring a favorite quilt or a quilt pattern that has special meaning for them:

**Saturday, January 15, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery  
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration for this and our other upcoming opportunities: 320.363.7116 or [www.sbm.osb.org](http://www.sbm.osb.org) or [dmanuel@csbsju.edu](mailto:dmanuel@csbsju.edu).

### Teresa of Avila, One of the Great Christian Mystics

It has been said that there has never been a "healthier" Christian than Teresa of Avila, a witness to the balance of "piety and politics, of religious experience and prophetic insight. This presentation will focus on three reflections: Teresa a woman of her time—Teresa, teacher of prayer for all times—Teresa helps us to engage in holy mystery.

Our presentations are designed for spiritual directors, students in spiritual direction training programs, clergy, and all others who are interested in the topic:

**Tuesday, January 18, 9:15-11:30 a.m.**

Sacred Ground Center of Spirituality  
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities: [www.sacredgroundspirit.org](http://www.sacredgroundspirit.org) or 651.696.2798 or [sacredground@sacredgroundspirit.org](mailto:sacredground@sacredgroundspirit.org).

### Loving the Two Halves of Life: The Further Journey

*"To live in this world, you must be able to do three things:*

*to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones*

*knowing your life depends on it; and,*

*when the time comes to let it go, to let it go."* Mary Oliver

As a society, we have not been taught the art of loving our mortal lives every step of the way. Thankfully, the wisdom of the elders—to help us embrace the two halves of life—is in our midst.

During the conference, we will clarify the tasks and pitfalls of the first half of life, and explore what we mean by "the further journey" of the second half of life. Called to a further journey, we will look within ourselves to see that the wisdom of the elders is not only in our midst, but is within each of us. Sponsored by the Center for Action and Contemplation. Led by Richard Rohr:

**Friday, Jan. 21 at 9:00 a.m.—Sunday, Jan. 23, at noon**

Hotel Albuquerque in Old Town, Albuquerque, NM

For information or registration for this or other upcoming CAC opportunities: [www.cacradicalgrace.org](http://www.cacradicalgrace.org) or 505.242.9588 or [info@cacradicalgrace.org](mailto:info@cacradicalgrace.org).

***The Isle of Monte Cristo: Finding the Inner Treasure,***  
by **S. T. Georgiou.**

In his first book, *The Way of the Dreamcatcher, Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax: Poet, Peacemaker, Sage*, S. T. Georgiou wrote of his first, chance meeting and of his evolving friendship—despite their fifty years difference in age—with a man who had been Thomas Merton’s classmate at Columbia, a man whom Merton called his “best friend,” a man of whom Merton wrote, “Lax had a mind full of tremendous and subtle intuitions . . . he was born with a natural, instinctive spirituality, . . . was much wiser than I, had a clearer vision, and corresponded much more truly to the grace of God than I.”

Georgiou drew upon his many conversations with Lax for his doctoral dissertation but then entered into some darker years, triggered in part by his ongoing inability—despite his excellent teaching and publishing record—of being able to find a permanent, tenure-track position in academia. “Over the past few years,” he writes, “I had gradually (and sadly) forgotten my spiritual awakening on Patmos, and my spirit-lessons with Robert Lax:

- to the day-to-day living in love,
- to the patient way of the heart,
- to the joy of giving oneself wholly to God.”

In ***The Isle of Monte Cristo: Finding the Inner Treasure*** Georgiou records his re-awakening to Lax’s spirit-lessons about the journey in and the journey out, to Lax’s conviction (revealed in his poetry and by what he said and, even more, by how he lived) that the inner journey is constantly nourished—perhaps even made possible—by our outward openness “to the divine Presence in everyday life” [Steve Georgiou’s words].

The inner journey is nourished by a special friend such as the one Henri Nouwen describes in his **“I have a friend...”** quotation noted below. Henri Nouwen’s words, but very Laxian in thought and sentiment.

The inner journey is nourished when, in Robert Lax’s words, you seek to “live in love, live in the moment, put yourself in a place where grace can flow.”

In ***The Isle . . . Finding the Inner Treasure***, Georgiou’s remembered conversations with Robert Lax are enriched by his own subsequent reading and life experiences. In the chapter “Field of Vision,” he tells of stooping to pick up some papers in the hallway outside his office, one of them being a striking photo of deep space taken by NASA’s Hubble Telescope with a caption underneath:

“This Hubble Field Image, assembled from 342 separate exposures, is the deepest view of the universe ever seen. In this tiny speck of sky—equivalent to a dime held 75 feet away from the naked eye—1,600 galaxies are shown. *A single galaxy is believed to contain 100 billion stars.*”

“I was awestruck—the sheer magnitude of these figures was staggering. If in such an incredibly tiny area of space 1,600 galaxies existed (each with 100 billion stars), then what of all the other spaces in the universe?”

When he showed this powerful image (via a large-screen projector) in the theology class he was teaching, he “noticed how a hush swept over the students—their nervous, scattered energy had stilled. For a few quiet moments everyone was on the same spaceship, mystified by the grandeur of the infinite . . . a discernible holiness seemed to radiate through that celestial vastness.”

Georgiou does not belabor the point, but he clearly feels that his students had opened themselves to a place where grace can flow. And that many of them had sensed something of the infiniteness . . . and the beauty . . . and the oneness of God that was much more immediate to them—and much more true—than the carefully worked out lectures that he might give.

Like a conversation with a good and thoughtful friend, “. . . **Finding the Inner Treasure**” needs to be read rather than extracted or outlined. That being acknowledged we’ll end with a poem, with words written by Robert Lax,

**God the Holy Spirit dwells within us,  
as life within the seed.**

**He is outside and beyond us too,  
encouraging,  
sustaining the growth of the seed.**

**Still, though, let us think of Him as being within  
~ He is within ~  
and let us honor Him,  
in ourselves and in others.**

“I have a friend . . .

**who is so deeply connected with God that he can see joy where I expect only sadness. He travels much and meets countless people. When he shares, he tells of the hidden joys he has found: someone who brought him hope and peace, . . . little groups of people who are faithful to each other in the midst of turmoil, . . . the small wonders of God. And I am disappointed sometimes because I want to hear ‘newspaper news,’ exciting and exhilarating stories. But he never responds to my need for sensationalism. He just says, ‘I saw something very small and very beautiful, something that gave me much joy.’”**

Henri Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal Son*



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*“Thin Places in the Midst of a Thick World . . .”*  
*“Eyes wide open . . .”*



### AFTERWORDS: *“Eyes wide open . . .”*

A reader tells about an experience that must be an everyday happening across the land but which still seemed wondrous . . . and perhaps a lesson offered.

The experience was that of cataract surgery, long anticipated and then scheduled. Antiseptic eye drops for three days before, and then surgery on the first and weaker eye (the second and stronger eye was to be two weeks later). Some nervousness in the patient, confidence in the surgeon, and in fifteen minutes it was over. Only a few minutes later it was clear that it had been a success. Eye glasses that had been worn for years would no longer be needed, except for reading. And the world seemed so much brighter!

And then, arriving home, an even greater delight. The absolute vividness of the colors to be seen in the garden. The many varieties of flowers there had never been so bright, so full of life. A little reflection made it less surprising. After all, cataracts are a cloudiness in the lens of the eye, and it always is that when the clouds are taken away and the sun comes out, the world becomes brighter. But sober reflection could not diminish the delight in the discovery of a world that was more vividly colorful—and more alive—than it had seemed before.

And therein perhaps a lesson was being offered. The cloudiness of vision had come gradually and little noticed over the years. It seems fully natural to believe that what we see is what is there. An “eye witness” account is often thought to be good evidence. And sometimes what we think we see may be what we had expected to see, or wanted to see. We probably too often forget what a wise but gentle woman sometimes says to her friends, “You may think that way and still be wrong.”

If this be so, the lesson offered may be that—like Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus—we need to go beyond what we think is so. And perhaps a way to do this is to seek to have our eyes wide open to the vivid colors all around us, to “the Divine Presence in everyday life” . . . and to those spirit-lessons offered by Robert Lax, being open

**to the day-to-day living in love . . .  
to the patient way of the heart . . .  
to putting ourselves in places where grace can flow . . .”**