

A Field of Peace

Madeline Duckett RSM



A New Year... filled with new possibilities and a new hope as we open into a fresh start in 2024! Ilia Delio writes in one of her pre-Christmas messages: *"A new world is dawning in our midst. Only together can the beauty of God's love express itself because beauty is the harmony of contrasts."*ⁱ What might that mean for us in CEN as we look forward to the year ahead? How might we unleash beauty by "harmonising contrasts" when the world around us seems riven by division, violence, hatred, environmental deterioration, and a sense of immanent disaster?

In his poem *The Sleep of Prisoners*, Christopher Fry provides a helpful insight when he says:

*Thank God our time is now when wrong
comes up to face us everywhere,
never to leave us till we take
the longest stride of soul we ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
is exploration into God.*ⁱⁱ

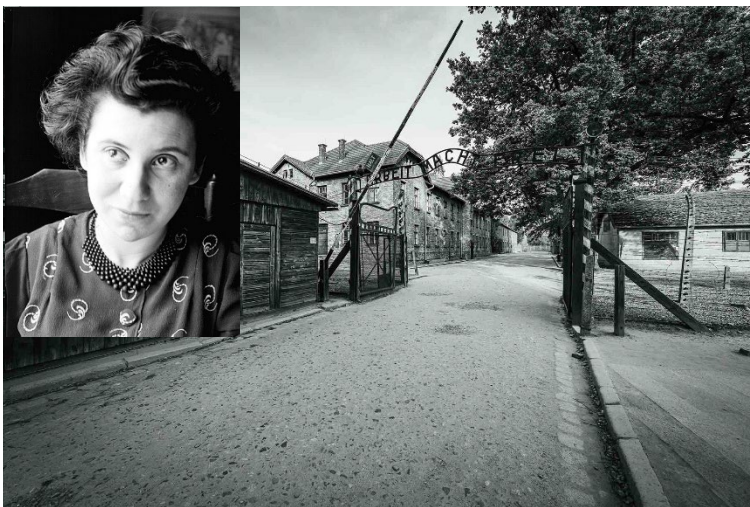
This divided world, filled with seemingly irreconcilable differences and "contrasts" may well be the very impetus for greater and deeper "exploration into God". It is all in how we SEE... that is, our lens of perception. As Teilhard de Chardin wrote at the outset of *The Phenomenon of Man*: *"Seeing. We might say that the whole of life lies in that verb..."*ⁱⁱⁱ If we can **see** the happenings around us now as a slow new awakening to a whole new level of being in this world—and cosmos—we can be peaceful and joyful despite, or amid, the present happenings around us.

The invitation at the outset of this New Year is to adjust our lens and SEE with fresh eyes—the eyes of birth! And how apt, in the wake of Christmas which celebrates the birth of Jesus the Christ! This child we celebrate in all kinds of ways with gift-giving, family gatherings and Church rituals, brings a new perspective of love in the face of suffering, vulnerability, hardship and evil of all kinds! The songs about "joy to the world" and "peace on the earth" are precisely about this new lens of perception—this new awakening...beginning in him, foretold from of old and carried forward through us!

In our times of significant and rapid scientific developments and insightful writings, we can begin to SEE that the **awakening** is the arising and evolving of a whole new consciousness—unitive or communal consciousness. This is the consciousness of the mystic who sees with the eye of oneness and unity rather than dualism, division, and separateness. We are invited to see with this “eye” when we contemplate alone and even more so with others. In fact, when we contemplate together as we endeavour to do through our regular 4.00 pm practice, we extend this field of consciousness—this lens of one perception.

As Ilia goes on to say in her pre-Christmas message, *“Life becomes wholesome and enriched as we live together, connected mind to mind, heart to heart, synergizing our energies through the unitive power of love. The power to do new things comes from within.”*^{iv} Such a vision is our belief and hope as we enter this New Year.

We are often unaware of the power we carry within us—power to change ourselves and the world around us. It is a power whose Source lies beyond us, but a power augmented when we “synergise our energies through the unitive power of love”. We do this in our CEN contemplative communion together. Sinking into the deep Ground of soul where Love dwells, we are more and more able to live from that well of Love and radiate it outwards no matter what we are facing externally.



OSWIECZIM, POLAND - MAY 22, 2023: Concentration camp Auschwitz in Poland. Image by Jiri Castka - stock.adobe.com. Inset: Etty Hillesum (photo: Omroep Zeeland)

Etty Hillesum is a great example of the capacity to do this. She, a young Dutch Jew killed in Auschwitz at age 29, somehow was able to keep her sights on the deep inner Source of her peace and spirituality throughout all that was happening externally. As her people were systematically persecuted and exterminated, and she knew that she would be so too, she seized opportunities to read nourishing things and to write in her journal so as to reflect on and help process what was taking place exteriorly.

In one of her journal entries when she was in Westerbork—the transit camp before being transferred to Auschwitz—she wrote: *“Despite the deadly fear I saw in all those faces...I am going to bed now. I hope to be a centre of peace in that madhouse. I shall get up early in order to brace myself”*^v. And further on, addressing God, she writes: *“...[O]h God...I shall wait patiently until the words have grown inside of me, the words that proclaim how good and beautiful it is to live in your world... despite everything we humans do to one another. The thinking heart of the barracks”*^{vi}.

This year, the invitation is to reflect from the deep well of peace within—from the place of Etty’s “thinking heart”, the “centre of peace”, she mentions. Here, we touch the inner Ground of being and are strengthened by others who are doing this with us. From here, we **see** with fresh eyes and begin to recognise the new awakening taking place in all the pain and dissonance around us.

In 2024, let us—individually and together—be “a centre of peace” and “the thinking heart” of the world and the cosmos as we take up the proposed theme and focus for this year,

PEACE: Growing the Field.



Let us work together to help grow this morphogenic field of peace present within and around us already.

ⁱ Ilia Delio, *Centre for Christogenesis* Christmas message, December 2023

ⁱⁱ Christopher Fry, *The Sleep of Prisoners*, *Dramatists Play Service Inc.*, 1998

ⁱⁱⁱ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper Perennial Modern Thought edition, 1955, p. 31

^{iv} Ilia Delio, pre-Christmas message 2023.

^v Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life, the Diaries 1941-1943 & Letters from Westerbork*, Owl Books, 1996, p. 184

^{vi} *Ibid* p 199