



# *The Threshing Floor*

September 2015

**Newsletter of the Guild for Psychological Studies**

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**Guild Vision:** The Guild envisions a world in which the significance of each person's truth, authority, and inspired purpose finds fulfillment in life and community.

**Guild Mission:** Guild seminars offer a way of psychological and spiritual transformation that inspires individuals to live their purpose, expand consciousness, and discover and create meaning in their lives and community.

## **What are the Records? Part III**

*By Hal Childs*

"I pray to God to get rid of God."  
Meister Eckhart (1260-1327)

Before taking the next step in this series I want to affirm that the centerpiece of the Records study, and really the centerpiece of the Guild's general seminar work, is the question. What we call a modified Socratic method is the use of questions that invite us to think for ourselves and come to our own answers. The Guild method uses questions and does not teach (in general). We could say that questions evoke the "Teacher" in each of us to come alive and create an answer on the spot. Questions, that is, the right questions that are open ended, stir mind and heart to life; questions generate activity even if it is not-knowing, confusion, irritation; questions awaken searching and seeking, and encourage us to get past the compulsion to come up with the "right" answer. Questions require us to find our own authority, and at times to live with the unanswered question. And it is not unusual for the unanswerable question to shape a life.

A question in itself, the structure of question, is neutral. However, the general point of view within which questions are asked is not neutral, and questions can serve any point of view. With regard to the Records study (the study of the Christian gospels), the point of view that one brings to the material will inform the questions that are asked. The theological approach assumes God, and because it assumes God (which means that the presence of God is unconscious), the idea of God is always hidden (implied) in the questions. And such questions always expect this hidden God to

be at least implicit in the answers as well. When everyone tacitly agrees with the theological approach, things go smoothly. Here I am talking in general terms about a form of consciousness, and I am not thinking of individual people, or groups of people, with radically different and sometimes violently conflicting ideas of God.

When we approach the Records with an historical interest rather than a theological interest, the assumptions of historical consciousness, and the assumption of an historical Jesus, function in the same way as the assumption of God in theological consciousness. The questions that are asked all rest in the fundamental assumption of the historical Jesus as the real ground, while in the theological approach all questions rest in the assumption that God is the real ground (and in a Christian context we should add, the Christ). The traditional historical approach to the Records study, established by Henry Sharman, could not even consider the possibility that the historical man Jesus was not the absolute core of the gospel stories. Sharman's basic assumption was that after the mythological, theological, and legendary texts were seen as non-historical (by historical consciousness), what was left was "the actual career of Jesus." (*Records of the Life of Jesus*, p. v)

In 1917, when Sharman produced the *Records* book, the historicity of Jesus as an actual person was a rock bottom unshakeable assumption, a reliable truth. In the early 1970s when I encountered this approach to the gospels and Jesus at Union Theological Seminary with Walter Wink, the historicity of Jesus was still an unshakeable truth. In the Guild this was the fundamental assumption, the basic form of consciousness that we all took for granted as we learned the Records study. All Records-focused questions assumed that an historical

Jesus was the source and origin of the Christian myth, and that the Christian myth of the Christ arose because of him, his teachings, and his influence (not that Jesus himself created the Christian myth, but that the Christian myth arose because of him). This brings us to another thorny and difficult theoretical problem, which is the role of Jung's depth psychology in the traditional Records study.

Basically, Jung's psychological ideas - the unconscious, the archetypes, the Self, etc. - were all confined to the inner world of the individual. Even though Jung had a concept of a collective unconscious, of an objective psyche (soul), which in theory is beyond the individual and would have a cultural presence, the form of Jung's thinking kept these concepts locked up inside the inner world of the individual as some kind of eternal, pristine, and natural realm of immediate psychic experience, available as a private subjective reality. While this view of psyche gave great solace to many sensitive spiritually oriented introverts (this writer included), and in fact does have some truth to it and also great value, it is fundamentally ego-centered and therefore humanistic in its basic orientation. Ironically, Jung's psychology is not soul-centered. Soul, as I understand it after reading Wolfgang Giegerich, is not my private subjective spiritual world, but rather it is the public sphere of contemporary society, culture, and history. Soul is always actively producing itself as a shared cultural enterprise, as history itself, and we are caught up in the truth of what soul is today, and has been throughout our lives. Soul is not in the past, it is here and now, an active live performance.

In the traditional Records seminar, the historical investigation of Jesus and his words and deeds was actually quite split off from the psychological process of the individual. Historical critical methods and historical imagination were for recovering the truth of the historical Jesus, and psychology was for our personal inner work. But a good example of where Jung's psychology was misapplied to the historical understanding of both Jesus and Christianity was how the idea of projection was used. It was thought that the Christ was a symbol of the archetype of the Self, and that the myth of the Christ (a new messiah) was projected onto Jesus because people at that time were not capable of internalizing Jesus' teachings. This view suggested that the Christ had no truth in itself, but was an unconscious projection of the Self. Such a conceptual framework is actually the retrojection into the past of a modern form of consciousness. But this problem is compounded by the fact that, first, this view of projection is incorrect to begin with, and, second, the ancient psyche was not structured like the modern psyche. Our experience of soul is completely different from the ancient (including Jesus' of course) experience of soul. Soul in this sense is the background structure of consciousness that invisibly determines how we

perceive and relate to our world. Just as fish cannot easily perceive the water that is their environment, so soul is our unconscious environment that generally eludes our perception.

Meister Eckhart's statement, "I pray to God to get rid of God," is of course provocative, and it is probably not quite the best translation of what Eckhart might have meant eight hundred years ago, when he stated it in the context of a thoroughly Christian form of consciousness. I came across this version of the statement in Thomas Moore's *A Religion of One's Own* (p. 15), simply quoted by him without any context. The style of Eckhart's "theology" is known as the *via negativa*, which takes the position that all human concepts of God are inadequate, and that the reality and truth of God transcends human understanding. So the statement, "I pray to God to get rid of God," could mean something more complex like, "I pray to God in order to get rid of my limited merely human understanding of God." Nevertheless, what we have to realize is that what Eckhart meant by the statement within the context of a thoroughly theological and Christian form of consciousness has little bearing on what such a statement can mean in the context of our contemporary secular and God-less, humanistic, and scientific form of consciousness. For us, really, thinking historically from a soul perspective, "God has already gotten rid of God." For Eckhart, God would have been a self-evident truth, no matter how he conceived or did not conceive of God. For us, the opposite is true: the notion of God in the modern world is an untruth; that is, the truth of God is not taken for granted, is not self-evident, for the public sphere. In modernity God has been reduced to a private, subjective belief, posited by private, subjective faith.

The theological approach to the Records assumes God and thus cannot get rid of God. The historical approach to the Records assumes the historical Jesus and thus cannot get rid of Jesus. A form of thought cannot work itself off because it is invisible to itself. Thus it is the psychological approach that takes up a soul perspective as a conscious choice in its approach to the Records (the gospels, the Christian tradition, the figure of Jesus) and sees the theological and historical approaches as past forms of soul that are no longer adequate for the work of "praying to God to get rid of God." The psychological approach takes up consciously the point of view that a series of historical sublations have already taken place, and that consciousness (as soul's new contemporary form) has achieved a new status in becoming aware of itself. Consciousness is now a new category that in itself views both "God" and "history" as sublated categories in the study of Jesus. Neither God nor history is thrown out, but they are no longer viewed as self-evident truths in themselves; they are not taken literally or simply at face value; they are seen as soul's self-constructions of itself in former times. To have psychological consciousness inform the Records study

and supply the fundamental orientation for the questions is a choice, but no one is required to make this choice.

I am not making a dogmatic statement about how the Records must be studied. But, after more than forty years of wrestling with the Records, the Christian tradition, and Jungian psychology, a psychology with soul is now the only perspective that makes sense to me. The Records study for me is not about a new relationship with "God," not about a new understanding of an "historical Jesus," but rather a work of transforming consciousness. But this requires that the lens through which one approaches the Records is a psychological one, and not a theological or historical one. One does not "pray to God to get rid of God" unless it is already the disappearing "God" that is itself already the one praying (in other words, it is not the ego who prays such a prayer). One does not work the Records to get rid of the Records unless the disappearing "Records" is already what is at work and is in fact what attracts one to the work in the first place. It is a *vocatio* that one is pregnant with, which after undergoing a long labor, is born.

### September Birthdays

Judith Peterson	Sep 2
Charlotte Brown	Sep 5
John Hopkins	Sep 5
Damilia Loupy	Sep 11
Eliane Wilson	Sep 11
Nancy Travers	Sep 12
Jon Orvik	Sep 13
Elli Norris	Sep 15
Barbara Lyon	Sep 20
Wilene Chang	Sep 22
Patricia Wilson	Sep 26
John Soderberg	Sep 28
Howard Lewis	Sep 29
Robin Taylor	Sep 29



### Flower and Reflections

*From Selena Sweet*

*Editors' Note: - Selena Sweet, NW Guild member, writes that this is a musing after coming home from an afternoon at an art showing followed by a gathering with friends and then finally after reading The Threshing Floor.*

I read the Threshing Floor - and get tired, exasperated by the intellectualism and annoyed by the self importance and rationalized superiority.

I come home slightly tipsy. The moon is full. And, I realize the only place in America where being full of energy and expressive is permitted is at a football game, and that that expression is so narrow, sterile, a blowing in the wind where there is no pollen and no bee and no receptacle to hold the potency.

Today, I went to the Out of Sight art exhibit of over a hundred Seattle artists and searched for a piece where I felt a response welling up. And found not one. The art is intellectual, so abstracted from instinct, sex, roots, awe-filled and awe-full that

I might have better spent the time looking at Smith Corona typewriters instead. What has happened to us Americans? The walking dead enchanted by empty fantasies and phantoms.

Took this photo of a poppy in Emily's and Doug's garden in Snohomish. You gaze at it and something inside rises. Not so upon encountering those sterile empty so called art works - which included a high top sneaker. Pitiful. Sad.



## Stay Connected

Bob Ridder, Administrative Coordinator, is available for all inquiries by phone at (415) 561-2385, or by email at [office@guildsf.org](mailto:office@guildsf.org).

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## Guild Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/guildsf>, launched in January! If you haven't yet, please "friend" and "like" us!

## Newsletter

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