**ASPEN INITIATIVE**

Nicholas: Well, welcome everyone to this Aspen Initiative webinar. It's great to have you with us. My name is Nicholas Vesey, and I'm the minister of the Aspen Chapel, which actually began this Initiative. And I'm going to welcome our panelists. And when they come on, you'll be able to see them. They'll maybe give you a little bit of a wave. First of all, I'm going to welcome Tim Shriver. Tim runs the Special Olympics and the Dignity Index and has worked a great deal, spiritually with Cynthia Bourgeault. Secondly, I'm going to introduce Marianne Williamson. Marianne has written 16 books and is known for her work with The Course in Miracles and of course, ran for president last year. Her weekly talks are available on Marianne.com and her new book is “The Mystic Jesus.” So do get that. Cynthia Bourgeault speaks all over the world and is well known for her collaboration with Thomas Keating in opening up Contemplative Wisdom and Centering Prayer.

Matthew Fox is the founder of the Center for Creation Spirituality. He's written 44 books and really has laid the groundwork for much of the work that we're doing today. And he's doing a new course called **From Darkness to Dawn** about this very issue that we're talking about with two members of the Initiative, both Mirabai Starr and Andrew Harvey are going to be joining Matthew on that course, and you can find details of that course on our website.

Cyprian Consiglio is a monk, musician, author, and teacher. Most of his music and his teaching revolve around the universal call to contemplation and universal wisdom, as taught by Bede Griffiths. He now lives in Rome, where he'll be serving as the secretary general for Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue.

Andrew Harvey is founder of the Institute of Sacred Activism, an organization focusing on inviting people to take up the challenge of the contemporary global crisis that face us to create a more peaceful and sustainable world. And he's also doing the From Darkness to Dawn course with Matthew.

Shane Claiborne is a prominent speaker, activist, and bestselling author. Shane worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta and founded The Simple Way in Philadelphia. He heads up Red Letter Christians, a movement of folks who are committed to living as if Jesus meant the things he said. He's correct.

And Sherri Mitchell is a Penobscot lawyer, author, teacher, and activist from Maine. She's the author of “Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom” from Spirit Based Change that provides a roadmap for the spirit and a compass of compassion for humanity.

The purpose of the webinar is simple. To answer the question, how do we respond to the time that we're living through? It's a practical question. I've been asking that question myself, and really, that's the reason for the initiative. If we come from the idea that we are all part of one unified consciousness, how should we be responding? Is there a better way than placards and pitchforks? What are we being called to do? Now we've got Sherri Mitchell with us.

In her book, “Indigenous Wisdom,” she says we allow ourselves to become the observer. When we do that, we see life in a whole new way. There is no more right writing role. No obligation or expectation. No commitment or entitlement. There is only the thread of life rising and moving and returning to the source. There is only the expression of life coming to know itself and seeking to transform itself into something new. This awareness releases us from our old stories and allows us to live our lives fully present and completely free. And when we live our lives connected to the source, we realize that there is no separation, no limit. There is only boundless possibility and endless truth. So our question is how do we live this in our current time? To begin with, I've asked Sherri to give us a blessing for this meeting, and then Marianne is going to say a prayer.

**Transcription of Panelists begins:**

**Sherri Mitchell:**

Thank you so much, Nicholas. I am going to deliver the blessing in my language, and then I will translate. My name is in my language. It is one of my family's bear clan from the Penobscot Nation and Crow clan from the Passamaquoddy Tribe. What I just shared was a prayer that welcomed all and gave gratitude for all of creation.

…was connected to that sacred feminine and sacred masculine who sit, with the creator to help us, to guide us, to come together with a good heart and a good mind, to ask the ancestors to transfer to us that wisdom across time that we all carry within us, that gives us that ancestral hope that we can survive through the dark times as well. And, to let our words be truth, and then to let them live so that they can find expression in the physical world. And recognizing that all that we think and speak and do impacts all of our relations in the living world and that we be guided with the mindfulness of that heart.

Nicholas: Thank you. Sheri. That was lovely. Marianne, do you want to say a prayer to start us off?

**Marianne:**

Dear God of our understanding, we give thanks for joining me here today. We give thanks and blessings to Nicholas and Heather and all of those who brought us together. We devote this time together, all of our relationships to one another, to the spirit that is our source, the all powerful Divine Creator. We pray that we might be the people that God would have us be, that we might do what God would have us do to bring forth light in the midst of darkness and love in the midst of fear. We pray for God's Spirit protection and miracles to be upon us, our country, our world. All people, all species on the earth itself. May this point of darkness and concern turn into a miraculous new beginning, and may we serve it well. And so it is. Amen.

**Tim Shriver:**

Thank you so much, and thanks everyone for joining.

I'm very humbled to be a part of the conversation. Let me start with a short story that took place two weeks ago. I was at the Special Olympics World Winter games. They were held in Turin, Italy. 100 countries sent about 1500 people of all ages, all with intellectual or developmental differences. These are people who would be classified as having, in most cases, very low IQs, most of them coming from countries where they would never go to school, rarely have friends, get substandard health care, and feel the brunt of isolation and stigma and humiliation daily.

They marched into the arena in Turin. The opening ceremony is quite celebratory as is often the case with big events. They crossed from their little holding tent outside, through and over the tunnel and then into the arena. When the event was over, one of the people working on production said to me he'd spoken to one of the security guards who had helped direct traffic so the athletes could cross. He was out there, this security guard, for the entire time. And he turned to the production guy and he said, you know, I just saw the whole world pass before my eyes, and it was beautiful. I offer that perhaps as a grounding for a certain way of seeing if I can quote my teacher, Cynthia Bourgeault. What was distinctive about these athletes? No power, no beauty, no approval, no wealth, no fame, nothing that would traditionally satisfy the desire for approval or security or control. Instead, what that security guard somehow intuited was that they were marching simply with their God given beauty.

They were there simply as children of God. No pretense, nothing they'd earned. Nothing society had given them. Just them. It was as though, in my view, there was an invitation that this particular guy with his security guard clearance saw. What he saw, what I might call not so much what comes from centering prayer, the invitation to the naked intent, to the quieting of the mind, to the release from the distractions of the mind. But maybe almost like a centering communion, similar release from the distractions of the ego, of the control mechanism, of hatred, of fear, of anger. Somehow he noticed that this simple beauty in creation, in relationships not simply within us, but between us.

In my view, this is reflective of what I consider to be the central challenge of our time. Maybe of any time, maybe the central challenge of the gospel itself to reverse or unseat the distortions that we today lionize, that we celebrate, that we cheer for the distortions of dehumanization, of scapegoating, of contempt that our fear and our anger and our control mechanisms are so taken over our national discussions, at least in this country, that we've come to accept them as normative, that it is okay to think that problems can be solved or families can be healed, or violence could be prevented, or justice can be brought upon us by the hatred of other people.

So, in recent years, I've left my full time role in the Special Olympics movement and focused, as Nicholas said, on this work of what we call the Dignity Index. It's a scoring tool. It can be summarized on one page. You can score from a one, which is, I believe you are so dehumanized, that I should kill you or treat you with violence all the way up to an eight. Which is where I love you no matter what, no matter how different our points of view. Maybe as Shane might say is actually what Jesus taught. So it shows us the range of responses we have to one another when we disagree. It isolates just one factor in our current cultural crisis of how we treat each other. That's it. How do we treat each other? There's a range. I want to kill you. I'll love you no matter what. And everything in between.

The Dignity Index we designed to allow us to score other people. But what we found quickly and quite surprisingly, was that when people look at the Dignity Index, what they don't see as other people, what they see is themselves.

They see their own score, their own complicity with contempt and hatred. They see how close their language is to the language of violence. That in pursuit of justice, the self-righteousness that has overtaken us, almost all of us, allows us to conceal the hatred and contempt we hold within us by justifying it as the pursuit of a higher order. Justice. But contempt does not do well when exposed. And what we found with this Dignity Index tool is just a glimpse that we have of this, of the extent of the lie, of the extent of the distortions.

The dignity Index is giving us the tools. Schools are very interested; in businesses, political leaders and others, not because it tells you what to do, but because it reveals to you what you're already doing, and it invites you to perhaps enter more deeply into this sense in which the lies are removed and the world is revealed as passing in front of your eyes and beautiful, as opposed to passing in front of your eyes and filled with hatred and fear and contempt.

Is it possible to shift our culture? I think there's no doubt that it's possible. I know it's possible because I saw it in Italy just last week. I saw the whole world. It also passed before my eyes and it was beautiful. The choice is ours. Maybe one at a time to build not just the inner resources, to see that world and to recognize it, but to see it in each other, too. Thank you Nicholas.

Nicholas: Thank you Tim ... .And Marianne, do you want to just give us your perspective and as to where we're at at the moment and how we really should be responding to what we're doing at the moment?

**Marianne**: Thank you so much. You know, Tim, what you said was very beautiful, very moving. What Tim Shriver just described as, what the world could be when we, in his words, unseat the distortions.

If we are to look at this in terms of religious language, he spoke of the resurrection. He spoke of the healing. He spoke of the entrance into the Promised Land. But, slavery in Egypt was experienced by the Israelites before they got into the promised Land. And the crucifixion, of course, preceded the resurrection. You can't skip the crucifixion. Go right to the resurrection. That's not transcendence, that's denial. And I think that there has been a little bit too much of that in the higher consciousness and modern spirituality movement.

In “A Course in Miracles,” it says we need to look at the crucifixion, but do not dwell on it. There's nobody who's not looking at it now, because we in this country are experiencing a collective crucifixion of our democracy itself. So the point and the theme of this joining, as I understand it, as articulated by Nicholas, is how do we respond with wisdom to this time in which we live? The inner work that we need to do is as important as the outer work, because all of the political issues, all of the breakdown, all of the genuinely catastrophic, dynamics that are occurring in this almost demolition of our democracy as we know it, is a level of symptom, and there will be no healing without moving into root cause. And there will now be no healing without our seeing this in an integrative way.

Not only what are the actions that are necessary. But who do we have to be in order to discern the actions that we are called to perform? And also how do we become strong enough to do that? So the question becomes, who do we have to be to both endure this moment and to transform this moment? How do we become the Moses? How do we become those who can take on this moment?

In Alcoholics Anonymous, it says that every problem comes bearing its own solution. When Tim was talking about unseating the distortions, I think it's important, as mature thinkers and mature adults, that we realize that too many of us did not choose to take our part in unseating those distortions, or this could never have happened. Those distortions have to do with the primary vulnerability of our society to this, and that is that for the last 50 years, the transfer of wealth, the transfer of opportunity, too much, too much isolation. Tim was talking about our acting together in community. There's been so little of that relatively over the last 50 years.

Much of that was contributed to by an economic system and so forth. So there's a lot of work that we can do within ourselves. Where was I distracted? Where did I form my own thinking? Where did I really surrender the responsibilities of citizenship, thinking if I just voted every two years or four years, that would be enough. I believe there's a lot of deepening going on here. I think when in AA they say every problem comes bearing its own solution. I think part of that right now is maybe you were sort of immature in your thinking about all this. Now. I bet you were before, but I bet you're not now.

I've had a 40 year career working with people whose lives are in a very dark chapter, and I have seen over and over and over again something that I believe is happening to us collectively right now. People who had been dwelling in a kind of shallow level of things all of a sudden get the worst news, and you watch just layers of ultimately unimportant things begin to fall away within the first five minutes, and their mature, focused adult shows up.

My parents, my father, fought in World War Two. I know there are people on this. Call your parents or your grandparents, and some of you, perhaps even your grandparents, fought in World War Two when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. My parents would tell us the next day, all the men were down signing up. There was no question that they were going to show up. What I'd like to submit to you is that we are going through an attack, an assault on our freedom and on our democracy. As bad as any that has occurred in our history. The first thing we need to do is show up. It's an attitudinal change. The first question is not what do I do? The first question is, Who must I be in order to be the person necessary to endure this in my own life and be part of the collective change?

In “A Course in Miracles” it says that an ideal grows stronger when it is shared. So when people like Nicholas feel moved to create communities like this, this is an important part of it.

When we come together. This moment is not only about our individual spiritual practice, it's about moving into the vertical together, the way we are doing here. The next issue is, as the course of miracles says, God has the answer to every problem the moment the problem occurs. These distortions that Tim referred to have created all this. We don't have time right now to indulge too much analysis of all this. Historians will be doing that for years. What we have to do now is to become radically available and radically receptive in one of the gospels. My favorite gospel tune is God Use Me. Think of yourself as an immune cell. Think of yourself. Many millions and millions of immune cells…There's no one person that's going to save us. Each and every one of us think of this as a choir. This is not just a moment of the soloist. By the way, I lived through the 60s.

A system of darkness knows what to do if it’s only solo-ist. They just shoot the soloist. This is not a matter of solos. This has got to be a choir, each and every one of us singing our notes. No time for false modesty. That's for you, Tim Shriver. No, not a time to say, oh, other people are wise or other people are stronger. Each and every one of us. Nobody's role is more or less important. If you are an American, by definition, you live in a place where there will be a congressional race in 2026. Take that in with clarity. Abraham Lincoln said there's not that much evil any person can puppet; any government can perpetrate, as long as the people remain vigilant. He was referring to the fact that the way the Constitution reads every two years, we could theoretically completely get rid of every Congress person and replace them. Abraham Lincoln was before there was gerrymandering, before there was the undue influence of money. But it doesn't matter.

Each and every one of us in our congressional districts, each and every one of us now, this is what is happening right now. It is not just an assault on our democracy, it's an assault on our nervous systems. There's a lot of spiraling down. So two things. Number one, is to know that we have not all developed the musculature of strength to know I will not spiral down, but you mustn't spiral down…for if you spiral down there's somebody around you that you could encourage today, that you could love today, that you could support today will not be supported if you spiral down. So each and every one of us, there's a metaphysical principle that in every moment, everything you need is either already here or on the way. That has to do with our inner life, and our outer life has to do with how you eat in order to strengthen yourself at this moment. Exercise, prayer, meditation, community and political activism. It's got to be the inside, and it's got to be the outside.

This is a whole systems’ breakdown, and we need a whole system's response. So I always say, pray in the morning, kick ass in the afternoon. To ground ourselves in the work of spirit, I commend Nicholas and Heather because what they ask of the Aspen Chapel is this realization that spirituality today is not just about what we know, but it's about who we are willing to become. So I want to thank Nicholas. I want to thank Heather. I want to thank all of you. It's an honor to be here. And I, in my own consciousness, hold to the idea that meetings like this are kind of like time release capsules. And my prayer is that any insight shared by all the incredible speakers here today will take seed within our consciousness, seed within our minds and within our hearts. The divine bridge between heart and mind will now take place. Largely because of this collective broken heart. We will be better. We will recreate, we will revitalize.

We will regenerate our democracy and our world. In the meantime, you and I must be strong. We must be devoted. We must be humble before the God of our understanding, and we will together kick ass for our country. Thank you so much. God bless.

Nicholas: Thank you Marianne. Fantastic, wonderful leadership… from me. We appreciate that. That's absolutely brilliant. Cynthia, do you want to come in and just, give your perspective on where we're at at the moment?

**Cynthia:** Thank you. And I almost would want to say, Marianne. Don't go. Thank you for naming it. Thank you for putting the issue squarely on the table in all its solemnity and not trying to use, as we so often do, our spiritual practice to restore a kind of specious self calm or let's just hold ourselves above it. That always sort of distresses me that whenever I speak out at all on any kind of issue, even kind of mildly and mentally on a website, I will always get at least 3 or 4 irritated comments saying it's not right for Contemplatives to speak out. You should be praying, and you shouldn’t get messed up in politics or that you're hurting me when you're naming something that's not contemplative.

We've suffered from a long and hard history that our recent spiritual renewals all got their roots going in the 80s, which was the me generation. And we have so much going on of self, self perfection, self calming, self-realization, staying above the waters, that sometimes I feel like we don't even notice when the waters are turbid and murky and drowning our fellows and drowning ourselves. So that moment is upon us. I concur 100% with what Marianne has said about the severity and immediacy of our plight. The question is, what are we going to do about it? And I think one of the real strengths in this panel is probably going to prove itself to be that we're all in slightly different places in our mix between contemplative impartiality and aroused, even engaged in impassioned action.

I think that this range of diversity may turn out to be the strength in this gathering, because the highest possible outcome for me would be if we could form a phalanx with one hand reaching to others, and each of us, with our slightly diverse niches, could join hands to create an unilateral bridge stretching from the heart of God and our highest vision of what conscience and tells us to do down into action, right in the fields.

I think we can do that knowing who some of my partners are. I'm just waiting Until we let Andrew and Shane and others out of the box. But I would say that many of us on this panel subscribe to what we might call the sort of, non-dual way of looking at programs which isn't really just non-dual, but just..higher spiritual consciousness in all the great traditions from the get go, which is based on three premises that you just don't dare abrogate.

The first one is that no human being is wise enough to know the mind of God, the divine plan, and from our own short circuited limited perspectives and eagerness to judge, we will sometimes short circuit processes that are actually playing out over a longer time. We will sometimes mistake what looks like Götterdammerung as, for a necessary correction. Because our time frame isn't right. We jump in, we over judge. We were reactive. And so the traditions say do not judge, Particularly the mind of God.

The second thing is what the non-dual trending traditions tend to say is that impartial action, genuine objectivity, the source of compassion and skillful means, has to come and can only come as a result of learning the painful lesson that the root of impartiality is that we must learn to prefer the shape of our mind over the content of our consciousness; the anguish and drama of our story.

And again and again when we get bent out of state and we dramatize the story and lose the shape of our mind so it doesn't have that capacity for calm and seeing, we're just going to be part of the problem.

The third thing that contemplative and non-dual perspectives bring, which is radically denied and fought against by the more activist edges, is that in non-dual action and perspective, anger, cruelty, greed, reactivity will never produce right action. Anger may be a source of a lot of fury, but it's not ever going to release and lead to anything that will really be a genuine resurrection.

So all of the traditions that I've read across the board keep bringing us back to these truths that if we act with less than skillful means, if we act out of blame and judgment and anger and retaliation, vengeance and fear, that's what we're going to create in the world. That's what it says. But on the other hand we do have to act and that’s where we are. I would take it even more radically than that.

What Marianne says is we are in an upheaval, a spasm of collective insanity. I call it collective trauma bonding, which is the result of a prolonged exposure to a pathological madman. I think that Marianne is taking a big, optimistic gamble to say there will be elections in 2026. They may be history by then. The moment for action is now, and as I try to say, where am I going to fit in this, I realize that I feel the Quaker blood boiling in my ancestors who somehow knew out of the deep, mystical kindling of their faith in God and their living and joyous reality of living in the resurrection life, that they could reach out and address the situations of the world, the really hard ones of their time, like slavery and the Holocaust with compassion and presence with skillful means.

That's what I've been teaching my people and my wisdom. Network. prayer, meditation, self-medication, maintenance, putting your own mind back together, fasting from the news when it's going to drive you berserk. But at the same time, Metis, which is skillful, means knowing how to deliver the right blow at the right time, with the right energy and martyrdom, not being afraid…To step up and offer your life. I think that if we fail to think with that degree of seriousness, we're kidding ourselves. I'm not going out to look for it, but I know that the universe has never seen such a worldwide pathological cataclysmic upwelling, and that blood will be shed. I remind myself we only die once. I remind myself we've been studying the martyrs to see that they acted not out of anger and fear, but out of being already sacraments of what the human race looks like. We hold one tiny place in the sliver of a human and planetary story that's going on for 4.5 billion years.

We must uphold our place with dignity, courage, and with a clear ability to represent and to live and die by conscience. What is highest in our human experience passed on from those of our great teachers, from the history of the planet to the ones who are our kids and grandkids and unknown who will come after. This is our post. We must step up to the plate and carry it.

Nicholas: Thank you…appreciate that…It's great to have you with us, Matthew.

**Matthew:** Thank you for calling this gathering so rich and such an important question- how to respond to the times we are living through. An archetype comes to me - that of the spiritual warrior.

And, here's a statement from Hafiz, the great Sufi mystic**.** It is a naive person who thinks we're not engaged in a fierce battle. For I see and hear brave foot soldiers all around me going mad, falling on the ground in excruciating pain. You could become a victorious horse person and carry your heart through this world like a life giving sun only if you and God become sweet lovers. The relation between the soldier and a warrior. And the difference is that the warrior is a lover. I had a student once who was Native American, and he told me when he came back from the war in Vietnam, his elders had said to him, you have been a soldier. Now we will make you a warrior. I said, how long was the training? Four years, he said. Four years. Distinction between a soldier and a warrior. The soldier's given a gun and goes out and says, kill or be killed. That's the job of being a soldier. The warrior is, Hafiz points out, has love as the origin, the source.

And this has been said several times this morning already. Compassion the source, love the source. And Christians easily forget, I think, that the book of wisdom, the reading from the Book of Wisdom, which is read on Midnight Mass, the most sacred night of the year of the whole year. In the Christian consciousness, the birth of Christ says that a stern warrior leapt from the throne of heaven to the earth.

That's the story of Christ in one sense, and that he's called a spiritual warrior. So some people think, oh, warrior, I'm too old to use that language or talk about war. Yeah, well, war is reality, and that's the point of how far it is in a person that thinks we're not engaged in a fierce battle. So how do we develop this spiritual warrior in ourselves to do the things that have to be done to stand up, to be counted? Who will sacrifice to go to town meetings and to call them if necessary, and to stand in the face of your representative and write them and so forth.

Or to run for office yourself. All these actions are necessary and many, many more. But we do have to ground ourselves, as everyone has said today, in their own way…I loved how Tim began our entire day here, talking about the word beautiful and beauty and the beauty of these young people, in the games, who, as he pointed out, were so often isolated and looked down upon. But his last telling, the last sentence of his story was that quote from the other fellow who was there that he saw beautiful humanity walking by. Yeah. I love what Derek Walcott said when we received the Nobel Prize for poetry in 1972. In his acceptance speech, he said the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world in spite of history. So we need to ground ourselves. History is terrible today. Everyone has been saying that. Of course it is.

But we have to ground ourselves in that love of the world. That is in spite of history. And here is where the new cosmology helped so much. Telling us our journey has been 13.8 billion years. It's no small thing that we're here. And the fact that we're here and we are the last survivors of our hominid genus, all our cousins are extinct in Neanderthal and denizens and all the rest. We've counted 14 of them so far. So even before Trumpism came along, we were facing the extinction of our species and millions of others that are going out of business at this very time. Mother Earth is being attacked by this raw politics of hatred that has been named well this morning. And of course, that's part of the killing of the mother. That's part of the killing of the feminine. The word wisdom is in the Aspen Initiative. Wisdom is feminine. Around the world we have all this knowledge. All this knowledge is enough to blow up the world so many times.

And we don't have wisdom. So all this is calling us to say the via positiva, the joy of life in my book, anticipating what was coming right now called Trump and the Antichrist and MAGA movement as Antichrist. In conclusion I say this-we have to become camels. Become a camel. What does the camel do? Fill up at that oasis of joy in beauty and gratitude for these 13.8 billion years that have brought us here.

Fill up on that because we're crossing this desert of the via negativa of the dark night of the soul, the dark net of society. And today, the dark night of our species. Because the dark night is fierce. It is relentless. But it is also sometimes necessary to wake us up as a species. I'm glad that Tim used the word sacred, but Thomas Barry says that we will not accomplish environmental survival if we do not recover the sense of the sacred. And so this is what meditation, contemplation, spiritual practices are about. They are about filling up at that waterhole, that oasis of the beauty of life.

And then you're ready for the via negativa, which is so fierce. Then the spiritual warrior comes forward, and then there is the creativity. And that's really what we're doing today. We're sharing our creative thoughts on how we can gain the depth that is so necessary to carry on the battle, and that is the transformative struggle for justice, which is a struggle for compassion, equal justice, racial justice, economic justice, social justice, gender justice, gender preference, justice.

All of these are on the table today. As Carl Jung said, the Age of Aquarius that we're now in will no longer be under the table. It'll be on top of the table. But will we have the will to deal with it? Instead, what we're experiencing is this denial and these lies and truth and justice go together, which means lies and injustice go together. And this is a world we’re swimming in. So we need our allies. Marianne Williamson said we have to recover the community again. And as Marianne says, there's no community without ritual.

We need new celebrations this Saturday. I'm glad to say I'm on my way to Tampa, Florida, to lead a cosmic mass, and people from many religious traditions and nuns show up at these masses. People are eager for ritual. Today, that's a community gathering of joy and of grieving and of creativity and empowerment for being spiritual warriors today. So these are ways, I think, that we're culture today. And, we have so many gifts from our ancestors and Jesus telling us, be compassionate as your creator in heaven as compassion is calling us to our divinity, to our being sons and daughters of God.

And these same messages are told by all the great spiritual teachers of the world. So we're in this together as a species, and in fact, it is a great honor to be called forth at a time like this, when so much is at stake and so much is on the table. So we want to bring our most generous selves to the battle.

Nicholas: Thank you, Matthew.

…Love that idea of just building up through meditation. The camel image is just fantastic. So appreciate that. We're going to go to Cyprian Consiglio now. Cyprian, who has studied a great deal, is talking to us from Rome. And, how do you see things, Cyprian, what's your perspective on what we've been talking about?

**Cyprian:** Well, it's been very interesting to watch everything from Europe instead of from America, that's for sure. You know, and especially my brothers talk over things as I work officially for the Benedictine Confederation. Now we work with the Vatican also in terms of inter-religious dialogue. What's been very interesting is I've noticed how I'm using the word lightly here, how conservative I've become in the sense of leaning back on my tradition, like leaning back on the best of my own tradition.

For example, I think the US bishops really have been very strong about the immigration situation in the states and have come out with statements about it. As soon as the Trump administration came up with their idea of, you know, clearing Gaza, I wrote to the Vatican and got the official statement from the Vatican secretary of state about the church's official position that the Palestinians have a right to live in Gaza.

And then I've been leaning back, obviously, on Pope Francis over and over again and issues of climate change, for instance, also leaning back on trying to find this bridge with the more conservative voices in my own tradition and in my own country. I'm a faithful follower of David Brooks quite often because he makes so much sense, but also following Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, because these are the bridges we really have to find. I mean, the gap between myself and my people is calling now. The MAGA Republican is so, so broad. That could leave me feeling a bit hopeless every now and then. And that's the thing I really want to talk about is…The main emotion I'm feeling sometimes is like a little kid who's getting bullied at school, or somebody caught in an abusive relationship and family and can't get out because it just seems to be such overwhelming power and overwhelming authority in the hands of people who don't seem to know how to handle that power and authority quite well.

But I was going back to these great phrases of Vaclav Havel and of Cornel West, you know, talk about hope. Vaclav Havel talks about hope as a state of mind. That's not just the surety that something's going to turn out right, but we're doing the good regardless, because it's the right thing to do, because we know this arc of the moral universe is very, very long. We may not see it, but we know that it's the right thing to do. Cornel West says he's a blues man. That hope and optimism are two different things. Things don't look too good right now, he says. But I'm a prisoner of hope. And hope doesn't breed optimism, but it breeds this energy, which I'm so glad to hear people talking about. And I actually, I love that phrase, spiritual warrior. Thank you for that, Matthew. I've used it quite often, myself. I feel like my job is very much to be an ambassador. I like to be a whole other face of all these things.

And now, of course, as an American who's quite often in foreign countries. I may be, you know, the only American that people are going to talk to at some point, the white guy, sometimes in places where I am sometimes the only Christian or the only Catholic, and I take that as a pretty serious responsibility to be a whole other face to this thing. And I'm kind of back to where I started from, anxious to hear Shane talk about this because he nailed it right on the head. Just a radical commitment to the gospel of Jesus. And back to the sermon on the Mount. I'm back to the Beatitudes, and reciting the Beatitudes is a part of my prayer life every single day. And having to be that, really believing that that's the answer. That Jesus' way is really the answer. And the second thing, I've been talking about this for years, and actually, this is where Nicholas and I first bonded many years ago, and I'm still on this and even stronger on this, the evolution of consciousness, because it's our decisions that have actually altered what we would call God's perfect plan.

And so in order for us to make better decisions, our consciousness has to change. And I keep leaning on that phrase of Albert Einstein. The problems we face are not going to be solved by the same consciousness that created those problems. We need a new consciousness. And again, I'm so happy to hear this, both from Marianna, from Cynthia. We cannot underestimate what I'm just now calling the deep work. My prejudice is in prayer and meditation. But the deep work is also of depth psychology, the deep work of all the people are doing in the native traditions with earth work as well. That's what's going to be the engine of this. We cannot afford to not do our inner work while we're doing the outer work, because otherwise we're just going to run out of energy and run out of gas for the thing yourself. The last thing I want to add to this is this beautiful image that Tim brought up in front of us. I saw the world passing before my eyes.

It was beautiful. This is what I feel like I get to see every day, you know, in the work that I do and the people I'm interacting with. It's so amazing and such a privilege to be, in a sense, in the global conversation. Again, I was in Princeton, about ten days ago, and gave a talk on what I called the Holy Leisure in the Evolution of Consciousness. I couldn't believe how these kids were, how attentive they were. And we weren't talking about light things. I mean, you know, they're about to graduate from Princeton, and I'm coming and talking about the evolution of consciousness instead of how to make a better salary when they get out to their real jobs. They were so engaged and had so many great questions and so hungry for this. And I find this in people all over the world are so hungry for the inner life, are so hungry for spiritual transformation. It's our job, as we've heard before, to be it, to teach it, to be it, to teach it.

I agree with one last thing: there may be suffering ahead for us. This is the feast of Purim. You know, the Jews are celebrating right now. You know, Queen Esther putting herself out for the same reason. Think it might have cost her life to name herself? Of course it ended bloody for other people, so maybe not the best example. We have to put our lives on the line at this point, and we believe not only in the cross from the resurrection. Thank you so much. Bless you all.

Thank you Cyprian. Absolutely lovely. So appreciate what you had to say about that. We're going to go to Andrew now. Andrew, just to give us your perspective and how you see things moving at the moment.

**Andrew:** It's a great honor to be with these extraordinary people. What I'm about to say will be very shocking to some of you. But if you listen, I hope I'll be able to convey the encouragement behind the terror. I'm going to begin by reading from Kabir who is, in my mind, the greatest evolutionary mystic poet who in the 14th century woke up to humanity being in what he called Kali Yuga and knew that it would either be destroyed or reborn. This, I've discovered, is true knowledge. Those who scramble to get into a boat sink like a stone midstream, while the…abandoned reach the other shore.

Those who dare to take the hard, winding, thorny road. They get to town in the end. But those who stroll the easy highway get robbed or even killed soon after they set out; everyone's wound in illusions where the so-called holy, as well as the worldly, and those who run for safety under the comforting dais of form and ritual and dogma, life's hurricane will lash them. Stay out in the open. You'll be left safe and dry. The ones love never. Savages live in boredom and pain. But those love devours like a cannibal.

Live in bliss forever. The ones who lose their own eyes come to see the whole creation blazing in their own light. But those who hold on to their own sight remain blind as bats in full moon. When I began to awaken to the truth in Kali Yuga I saw how bizarre and crazy the world really is. My friends, we are now clearly in an unprecedented apocalyptic evolutionary crisis, global and national and inescapable in its extremity and relentless growing intensity on how we respond immediately depends on the future of the human race and a great deal of nature.

We must be lucid and brave enough to start preparing now for the very worst while working tirelessly for the best. Knowing that, even that may not now be enough, but doing so in a spirit of passionate faith, fearlessness, celebration of all life, and radical openness to a miracle. In the year 2000 I was in India and had an awakening experience by the side of the sea in Mahabalipuram, in which the truth of the Trinity and of the dance of Shiva was revealed to me.

Stunned with gratitude, I went to the sacred mountain Arunachala to thank God, expecting the experience to deepen. But instead of being given a revelation of light, I was given a revelation of tremendous and terrible and apocalyptic darkness. I won't go into the revelation, but I will tell you of one day in which I was in a hotel room watching the film of the next 30 years unfold, and in that film I was shown everything that has happened. I returned to America absolutely aghast, not knowing what to be or what to do, and had an extraordinary conversation with Winston Churchill's granddaughter, Edwina Sands. And Edwina told me that at the end of his life, she had had a conversation with her grandfather in which she asked him what true leadership is in impossible extreme conditions. And he answered the following. What you have to be is strong enough to do four things. First, face the extremity of the danger yourself without illusion, false hope or magical thinking. Second, be brave and fearless enough to tell the others who depend on you.

Those facts without illusion, false hope, or magical thinking, whether they accept them or not, and whether they love you for it or not. Third, you must call on all who listen to risk. Drawing on the deepest wisdom, courage, passion and joy within themselves without flattering them or offering them false certainty. This is so important. You must evoke for them a goal exalted and inspiring enough to risk their whole being and their lives. For whether it is realized in the end or not, against an infinitely great and powerful No. Only the greatest possible Yes can rouse the necessary passion, courage and resistance. That has been the guiding light of my life since.

I began by saying we are in an unprecedented, evolutionary, apocalyptic dark night, and I'm going to say something that may shock all of you, but that is our greatest possible hope. Because if you do plunge into the truth of the dark night, and I have lived through a dark night of ten years and realized the truth of that, what you discover is that this unspeakable process is far more than a set of ordeals, far more than a set of impossible challenges.

It is a divinely ordained process in which the false self is systematically destroyed by divine, ruthless love. And slowly but miraculously, a new self- fearless, impassioned, divine is installed in you. The truth of our time is that all of us are in that global dark night process, and the hope in that process is that it can lead. If we are prepared to die into life and die into love and die into truth. Make of us the spiritual resurrection Warriors, midwife warriors that we must become for the human race to have any hope of survival at all. The most precise description of this amazing paradoxical process is given by Ibn Arabi, who says when God appears in the quality of the destroyer, the servant sees everything annihilated. Everything on earth will be annihilated, and they will remain the face of your Lord, who is both majestic and generous. So according to those who know it is necessary to die today before death. This death must come about by resolution. And the one in whom this state of death appears will see the complete annihilation of everything except God, and will not exist himself or herself.

The man or woman of knowledge in these affairs is lost and buried in nothingness. While this is so, God grants him or her an existence from God's own existence and paints him with the divine colour. All the qualities inside him and outside him have changed. And that day the earth becomes another earth, and the skies become another sky. And his real understanding begins only after this. So there is no way, my friends, to avoid this unprecedented evolutionary dark night. But there is a way through, and the way through is what all the great mystics who have been through this process tell us that it is. It is a way in which we need to die, to our narcissism, our addiction to comfort, our fear; a rabid embrace of limitation and in blind faith, to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the life and the love and the light that are eternal.

So don't pretend that you are going to get through this crisis simply by celebration alone or by prayer alone or by meditation alone. You will not. It is far too terrible. You will need to die in love, into love, and become love's sacred warrior. And that death is terrible. But there are those on the earth who have been through it, and who are here to help you and love you and encourage you and sustain you as you go through it.

Nicholas: You thank.

**Andrew:** And the reward of such a death is to be born into your eternal self in a body. And the reward of that is that you will be able to do exactly as Cynthia said, and thank God she said it, which is to be part of a massive worldwide global resistance movement of love in action, in which you must be prepared either to be imprisoned or to die. But you will be, because you will be strong, and you will be alive, and you will know that you are deathless.

So the two questions are what do we become and what do we do? What we become is dead people dancing. And what we do is immediately, if we are serious about this situation, become part of a worldwide resistance movement, which must start now on every level of the world against the insane authoritarianism that is now dooming our whole adventure.

Let us be brave enough. Let us die into life, and let us get going right now.

Nicholas: So inspiring and true. So appreciate what you've said. Absolutely touches my heart. Shane, do you want to come in and just say a few words?...

**Shane:** Well, thanks everybody for hosting this. I'm glad to be a part of it. I just want to say a few words about humility, courage and creativity. I think we're at a time where humility is scarce. And, the more common and many other studies have shown that, not only do people believe that their political opponent is wrong, but they actually believe their political opponent is evil. And a disturbing number of both people on the left and right think the world would be better off without those folks in it.

That's troubling. I think that I know who I was and what I believed 20 years ago. I've always loved the Scripture that says we're working out our salvation with fear and trembling. We're working through this, and I think we've got to make space for others to work through it. One of the stories I love about Jesus is in the Gospel of Luke, where he tells the story of a religious guy and a tax collector that both go to pray with two very different postures. The religious man, often called the Pharisee, stood up and thanked God for himself and pointed fingers and said, thank you that I'm not like all of these other people. The tax collector, on the other hand, was humble and just lowered his head and beat his chest and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. And, in that moment, I think humility is the posture that we are invited to enter into. I'm very aware that self-righteousness, moral superiority have a lot of different flavors.

I grew up with a very clear conservative piece that was like, thank you that I'm not like those people. But now, as I've gotten involved in the work of justice, there's a progressive side of it with its own theological policing, gatekeeping, and cancel culture. I mean, it's all there. And I, in the last election, actually made a proposal to the highest people in power, the Democratic convention, to make a Nevertheless Campaign so that they could name the things that people disagree with. Nevertheless, they will be voting against Trump. So we had Palestinian Christians that were deeply grieved and outraged by the arming of Israel and what's happening in Gaza. But they were told they couldn't mention an arms embargo or Gaza or anything that didn't align with the party. We had evangelicals that were going to support Kamala Harris, and yet they were told they couldn't mention abortion or anything else they didn't align with. So my idea was to have a nevertheless campaign, and there was no room for it.

Right? Like they said, that's exactly what we don't want to do. No, room for non-alignment. So humility is so important in our work. We're finding that those we don't agree with on everything can help move things in a way that we can't in our self-righteous silos. Gun owners against gun violence, hunters against assault weapons are leading the way in many places for gun reforms. Conservatives concerned about the death penalty, folks like my friend Joe Moody and Jeff Leach that are working together as a Republican and Democrat to do better than executing people in Texas. Those are beautiful, holy, subversive friendships. And, a word about courage is, I think humility doesn't mean we shouldn't have courage.

I think of Martin Luther King when he was talking specifically about the vocation of the church. And he said, the church isn't meant to be the master of the state, nor is the church meant to be the servant of the state. The church is meant to be the conscience, the holy conscience, the moral conscience of our society.

I think we need that courage right now, the courage that drove Colin Kaepernick to take a knee during the national anthem. The courage that rose apart showed the courage that Al Green showed to interrupt Trump. The courage that Bishop Budde showed as she simply proclaimed the gospel, in her National Cathedral. But we need humility and courage together. In Red Letter Christians we held forums on abortion because we believe we can have a better conversation on abortion. And we've had thousands, tens of thousands, over 30,000 people that have listened to these specifically centering the people most impacted, those who have lived through the terrible decision of having to have a abortion in the late term of their pregnancy. So we need courage. We need the courage of Doctor King to go to jail, to expose injustice, the rich tradition of direct action. And finally, I would say we need creativity. We need to not keep trying the same thing. So we like to say we're not just protesting, Nicholas. We're protesting, saying, we've got to proclaim a vision for a better world.

One of the things that we do in Philadelphia is we take guns off the streets and we turn them into garden tools. So this is actually a shovel made entirely out of a gun, both the wood and the metal. I like to tell my evangelical friends, this is what a gun looks like when it gets born again. And every time we do it, we are declaring that all things can be made. New stuff does not have to stay the way it is. And so as we do this, we say what's true of metal is also true of human hearts. That someone who's killed another person is more than the worst thing that they've ever done. And so we can stand on the side of life.

And finally, I'll just say that this vision of the prophets to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks is what inspires us. But it's pointing towards a vision of a world free of violence. Walter Brueggemann and Abraham Heschel, so many others, have said we often misunderstand the biblical prophets. We think that they were fortune tellers trying to predict the future, but that's not it. The prophets were not fortune tellers. They were truth tellers, and they weren't trying to predict the future. They were trying to change it, to invite us to imagine a different future by waking us up in the present. And so I would say that's our calling in the days to come. Have that prophetic imagination, not just to be able to name what is wrong, but to cast a vision for how the world can be better. So thanks so much to you and Aspen, all the different folks that have shared. Honored to be here.

Nicholas: And thank you so much. I really appreciate what you've just said. That image of that troll is just absolutely fantastic. We're going to finally come to Sherri Mitchell. Sherry, what's been your reflection on what you've heard and what are you thinking?

**Sherri:** Thank you, Nicholas, and thank you to all of the other speakers who have shared their wisdom before me.

I just want to acknowledge all those who are helping to make this happen behind the scenes. Thank you for holding this space for us to come together. And when I face a challenging situation, and this is certainly a challenging situation that we are in the midst of together, as a person who grew up in a ceremonial family I look to my own cultural traditions and look to prophecy. And one of the things that we know to be true about this time is that we are living in the time of the cannibal giant.

The cannibal giant is a figure in our mythology who wakes up at a specific cry of the Earth mother when we are consuming faster than she can produce and harming her faster than she can heal. Our stories tell us that this is the fourth time that we have been here, on the earth, that three other times we have tried to evolve our consciousness enough to continue this learning here. But we have failed to avoid the traps that we're currently facing today.

…What this role is, is to spin the earth faster and faster, to get us consuming more and more so that we eventually consume ourselves right off the earth. We spin ourselves off the Earth, and there are all kinds of corresponding stories that connect to that prophecy. What we know about this time is that we are moving faster and faster. We have an inability to make good decisions. We have a multitude of crises that are being erupted purposely right now around this country, but also around the world, that are keeping us from being able to focus on the things that we most need to do in order to slow things down, so that we can then reconnect with our own capacity to make good decisions.

We know that we're living in this moment right now of the dance of the cannibal giant. What this time does is it separates us within our being. So there's another prophecy about the human beings who are walking with their feet on the earth, their bodies and their heads connected with the through line that goes from above them, down through them, connected to spirit, down through their minds. Connected to the heart, connected to the earth.

And then beside them are figures that are walking with their heads separated from their bodies and their feet not touching the earth. The first figures who remain connected: spirit, mind, heart, body to the earth, continue moving through this process of conscious evolution. Those who allow their feet to separate from the earth and their heads to separate from their hearts, move themselves right off from the planet.

We are in danger of moving ourselves off the planet. There's no mistake about it. We are living in a time of a critical crossroads. And so what we do in this moment is really to look for the traps that have been laid for us, that are preventing us from being able to connect; are separating us from our capacity to make sound decisions that are disconnecting us from our empathy and our compassion that are causing us to buy into the illusion of divisiveness that is being presented to us. One of my dear friends, Catherine, always talks about how when we have an inability to feel deeply, we are prevented from taking deep action.

So we move across the surface. Right now, what's happening is we are being prevented from feeling deeply. We're being prevented from being able to access the full measure of our grief over what's being lost. We are living at a time when more than a million species are in danger of extinction, and we are one of them. We feel that in our bodies, the veil between us and the rest of the living world is thinning as it's accelerating, so that we can have a deeper connection to the experience that we are responsible for creating upon the earth.

And so we are at a time of deepening spiritual maturity, as so many have said. And one of the things that happens when we spiritually mature is we are able to have conversations that at one time were impossible for us. We were able to talk about the fact that we live in a narrow confine within our thinking that prevents us from seeing a multiplicity of possibilities. And so when we're thinking about, you know, catch words like the patriarchy, what we hear is that, you know, men are bad.

And so we then have a movement that eliminates all men from positions of power. We have this understanding that, racial bias and racial harm, racist action. Racial supremacy is something that is detrimental and destructive to humanity, not just to individual lives, but to our core humanity. And so then we throw out all people who we think are associated with those things.

We want to evolve beyond a binary, and we eliminate any discussion about complexity within that movement. And so we prevent ourselves from being able to have hard conversations, nuanced conversations, and we are willing to eliminate and to throw out entire segments of the population. And then we sit and we puzzle over why they've moved to the extreme right. Why they have become hostile, why they feel threatened. And we are unwilling to look at ourselves and to understand what we're doing in this moment to create more and more divides. As Shane said, there needs to be a great deal of humility at this time. We look at our elders and we revere our elders because of the wisdom that they've gained across time.

We live in a popular culture that glorifies youth and that hides their elders away in old age homes. Right? So we're making this shallow, artificial action that's based on superficiality rather than depth of wisdom. What we love about our elders is that as they're bent over, their hearts are closer to the earth. They're paying attention to where they're placing their feet. We need to be paying attention to where we're placing our feet. We need to make sure that we're keeping our hearts connected to the earth, that we're keeping our heads connected to our hearts because technology seeks to separate our heads from our hearts.

We want to upload our consciousness and separate our consciousness from our bodies. And in doing that, we are actually separating ourselves from the very sources of life and from the heart based wisdom that's allowed us to move forward.

Who do we need to become at this moment? I think that we have to be engaging in a process I talk about in, in my book, the 80 1010 rule of looking at the harm, becoming those spiritual warriors who are able to stop the flow of harm coming toward us without harming the other, honoring the sacredness of life, and actively building the world that we want to inhabit.

In order to do that, we have to be able to collectively imagine what that world looks like and then figure out who we need to be in order to exist there. How do we turn ourselves into those who are capable of existing in the world that we most want to inhabit? And what do we need to do to get there? How do we need to talk to one another? How do we need to care for one another? You know, all of those things are wrapped up in who we become. And hopefully these are things that we can talk about more in the group discussion.

Nicholas: Speaker 1 01:26:01 Thank you. I appreciate that amazing image you had of the name of the warrior, the cannibal image.

**Group Discussion to Answer Questions:**

**Heather:** First question, Tim, this is for you. And again, that amazing line I saw. The whole world passed before my eyes and it was beautiful. Both you and Marianne talked about reversing this, the distortions. And so here's a question: How does the Dignity Index embody the Beatitudes as taught in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount?

**Tim:** Thanks, Heather. First, I want to acknowledge that the tuning in process, as many other speakers pointed out, is not without its challenges or without its darkness or without its pain. I don't mean to glamorize the beauty of that. That security guard saw all. And one of the reasons I wanted to mention the backdrop of those young men and women who marched in, they have come through something… their capacity to invite the sense of beauty is a function of the enormous darkness they have endured and have come through to report back, in a sense, to the rest of us that they have survived, the flood.

They have survived the isolation. They have survived the great torment. The dignity index. It looks kind of silly, almost in comparison to the cosmic language used by many of us here, and which I, by the way, completely admire and value. But it just allows people to have a vision of what the Beatitudes are trying to embody with words. It allows them to see themselves in the beatitude; it allows them to see themselves in mourning and weeping. It allows them to see themselves as pure of heart, because you see yourself at the top of the scale and you say, wow, I could be pure of heart. And if I were pure of heart, what would I see? I would see God. It allows them to know the poverty that is theirs by understanding their complicity in contempt and hatred.

So I don't want to overplay it, but I also don't want to underplay that sometimes things catch us off guard. In the words of the great poet Seamus Heaney, catch the heart off guard and blow it open. The index, this, this little tool. And again, I don't want to overplay it, but it has this capacity to invite people, to get caught off guard and to see themselves as agents of potential change by seeing themselves both as complicit in the culture the chain spoke about so beautifully: the culture of self-righteous hatred, that is revealed to each of us as our complicity with hatred.

As one woman said to me after looking at the index, she said, I don't know what to tell you. I hate hateful people. And so this little tool just surfaces that. So let me stop there, because I don't want to take any more time from other people.

Heather: That's so helpful, Tim. There is a question here that I think you've also just answered. Would you be able to talk more about how we can help more people become aware of the need for the evolution of consciousness? Are there other names for this that might help people be more receptive and be able to experience it? So I feel like the Dignity Index is helpful for that.

Nicholas: I wonder, Cyprian, might you have more to say about that? Another way of talking about the evolution of consciousness for people who don't get the language so easily?

**Cyprian:** Yes, mostly influenced by Ken Wilber and his whole talk on this. The idea, I guess, comes mainly from developmental psychology. We move through these stages of archaic, magical, mythical, rational, pluralistic, and then integral. And one of the problems is we're dealing with maybe pluralistic and integral technology, but every person and every culture has to grow through the archaic, magical, mythical, rational stages to get there. This is really the problem. Like every person has to go through that. And quite often I feel like we have people in authority who are very much caught in the magical, mythical phase of religion and are using that language but dealing with pluralistic and integral technology. So the gap between those two things, that's a very careful operation because we scare people away and don't recognize and actually respect that magical mythical phase.

Ken Wilbur would say, all these things have to be, they all have their answers somehow. They are their truth to lead people from the known to the unknown…That's the huge thing. That's where compassion comes in. I don't grab a rosary out of my grandmother's hand and tell her to practice contemplative prayer instead. How do we go from the known to the unknown? It's an enormous task. Again, this is why I can say it. I'm trying to lean as far as possible on the most conservative voices in my own tradition to understand what truth they have, and I think Shane spoke to that as well.

Heather: Thank you so much. This is a difficult question. Whoever of you feels moved to answer this question: I am just learning about Christian nationalists whom it seems are significant architects and agents of this current dangerous assault in the US. I'm curious to hear from true Christians on the panel who are aware of this coalition and their thoughts on how to address and handle this very strong force that, in essence, is not anchored in the Gospels at all. Shane. Maybe you.

**Shane:** Well, I'm glad to start us on that. We have lots of resources on this, by the way, on our website, Red Letter christians.org. There's an entire movement of Christians against Christian nationalism. That's one of our partners on our website. I would say this nationalism is trying to camouflage itself as Christianity but looks nothing and sounds nothing like Jesus is actually a threat to democracy. It's also a threat to authentic Christian faith. And so many of us, many folks that are kind of squirmy on the conservative to liberal scale, are deeply concerned about this as a heresy of Christianity that begins to replace Jesus with America. To begin to really confine love to the people who live or are in this country. I challenge some of it theologically, but, you know, even the idea of being born again, I believe, is Jesus inviting us to love beyond biology, to love beyond place and nationality.

And that idea says, if one part of the human body is suffering, all of us are suffering. If a child dies in Gaza, it's as tragic as my own child. If a grandmother on the other side of the southern border is suffering. It's as tragic as if it were my own grandmother. So the Bible doesn't say God so loved America, but God so loves the world, and that's how we need to challenge it. So. Tons more to say about that. There are whole books on it. But that's just to get us started.

Heather: Thank you. And just continuing with that, there's a note here from someone to you, Cynthia, when you were speaking. Cynthia, thank you so much for daring to mention that it may come to the point of offering our lives. I don't hear that being spoken at all. And when I say it or even think it, I sense people think I'm going off the deep end. But it feels that way to me these times that we're in.

This isn't a question, just relief at hearing such a thing spoken out loud, but is there anything else you would want to say in response to that? Cynthia? [she left]

**Matthew:** This sort of spins off the question of real Christianity that was just being raised. In the earliest centuries of Christianity, martyrdom was right up there. And nowadays people have thought, oh, this is morbid. But the great generations, and of course, the event that follows and in some sense parallels the birth of Christ, is the martyr's death of Stephen.

Stephen doesn't die saying, bastards. He dies saying, I see the glory of God. I see the glory of heaven. And I think that the thing that a few of us have really tapped in on is that this is not about some sort of religious practice in a vacuum. This is as we stylize our levels of consciousness.

And I almost prefer the term conscience. You cannot have consciousness apart from conscience. You see the living Lord, you see Christ, you see God. You realise that the planet is not empty, but out there are people like Saint Francis and Saint Marion and all those who have lived and loved and given their best shot living according to the higher laws. They feed the ground and so that one embraces martyrdom not so much in order to get something after you die, something really good in heaven. That's ass backwards. Well, looking at it, it's because we, in exerting the freedom to love in the way that Andrew so beautifully spoke of, are already in heaven.

We are already living the gospel. I would maintain that we don't even begin to get in the outer precincts of loving the gospel until we begin to sniff this. So I think the real problem is that Christianity has failed progressively for at least 200 years. It's allowed itself to be taken over by a politically correct progressive liberalism that killed its myth, its tradition, its imaginal bandwidths, its cosmology, because they say these are superstitions and we don't know.

We have to realize that what Ken Wilbur's map actually relies on is John Gibson's typology. He said, there are no levels and there are no stages. All of these structures exist in us, and they're all good because they're all valid windows of perception of the real. I think that when we…impoverished the soul we lost the possibility of connecting with the living Jesus, with the living Holy Trinity, of living a real life out of principles, beyond things we can even imagine.

We brought it down to the level of our own enlightened self-interest, where Christianity will always die a little like a little squeaking pig. And no wonder nobody was watching the post. And so I think that for me, one of the places where I'm most concerned is to open to people as best I can through the wisdom tradition, a reappropriation of the true mythic, magical, mystical, cosmological wingspan of what our greatest teachers were saying, so that we can find the resources to flap our wings and live with courage. Fly with courage.

Heather Thank you. Matthew.

**Matthew:** Yes. Thank you very much. Cynthia and I would like to say when we talk about martyrdom today. it's not an abstraction. What went on with liberation theology and based communities in our lifetime? Tens of thousands of people were murdered. The year I was silenced by the Vatican, I went to South America to meet with leaders in that movement. And I met with the Bishop, who himself was silenced by the Vatican in the Amazon. The Amazon is his diocese.

And that week, they were having a retreat for about 150 church workers who were trying to save the rainforest. And the indigenous contributed work with indigenous people there. And, at the end of the week, they had a mass, a very simple mass in a gymnasium. And at the end everyone was asked to go up and light a candle and name three people they knew personally who had been tortured and killed. Afterwards, one guy came up to me and said, wearing a t- shirt and jeans. He said the hard part was limiting it to three.

I know at least ten, and one of my students, Sister Dorothy, was martyred 20 years ago this month in the Amazon. She worked it for 42 years, supporting the peasants and defending the rainforest, doing wonderful work. So, martyrdom is not an abstraction. We don't have to look back to the first and second centuries. I think more people have been killed in our lifetime in Central and South America, including Archbishop Romero, now Saint Romero, than happened in the first century in Rome. So, this is real. People have been standing up for what Jesus taught. And, they were condemned by their own church at times.

In fact, that's one reason Bishop Cassidy got to go with silence, because he called Bishop Archbishop Romero, who was a friend of his, a martyr in Rome, silenced him for that. And then, under Pope Francis, he canonized the guy. So the point is, what I learned that day, that mass where 150 people and ordinary folks in jeans and t shirts knew multiple people have been tortured and murdered- What I learned was courage that ordinary people and that Shane was talking about have this courage inside us. Everybody has it. But it's love that calls it out.

Courage comes from the two French words Courage, a big heart. And that's where the joy and the beauty that Jim talked about is so important to be positive. That when you're in love, then you are willing to make sacrifices. And, Sister Dorothy certainly did that. She is an ordinary, Catholic, from a big family in Ohio. And she was told, don't go back to the Amazon. Your name is on a list to be killed. And she said, I will not abandon the forest or will not abandon my people. And she's now buried there. At her funeral, a peasant farmer got up and said, Sister Dorothy, we are not burying you. We are planting you. And that is the lesson that I think that Kathy was just about, for Joyce, this is what resurrection means.

So martyrdom is not an abstraction, but you don't seek it. You seek the truth. You seek doing good for good sake. You think: seek justice. And if that gets you in trouble, it gets you in trouble.

Heather: Thank you. Matthew. Andrew, would you like to carry on from that? Yes.

**Andrew:** When I was in my dark night, my life was being threatened. Daily bombs were being thrown through my window. I lived in constant terror of being killed. And there came a day when I had to make a decision. I could stop the madness by lying. Or I could risk my life by telling the truth. And on that day I faced in myself all the apathy, all the paralysis, all the despair, all the helplessness and powerlessness that was in me. But I found in myself the courage to say, I will die if necessary, but I will never lie. And what I learned on that day is something that has given me courage ever since. I learned one very simple and one very terrible truth.

I learned that you cannot change anything you are not prepared to die for. The second thing that I want to say is that I have loved every single person's testimony. But for me, Cynthia's call to realism has been the most important call. Cynthia said we cannot expect elections. There is already a politicized military. He has already invoked the Alien Enemies Act. The legal barriers are crumbling. The Supreme Court is corrupt. There has to be a resistance movement. And it's beginning. But it will have to face the fact that Tiananmen are possible anywhere in this country. So there will have to be people brave enough, as they were during the civil rights movement, to love justice and peace and possibly enough to go on to the streets knowing that they might very well die. Only those kinds of people can change what we are going through, and it is my deep hope that what we have been sharing will inspire you to tumult. First, the martyrdom of the Dark Knight, the martyrdom to the false self, the martyrdom to addiction, to comfort the martyrdom, to all of your fears so that you will be able to stand up come what may.

And secondly, the martyrdom of active immediate resistance, in which you will have to face that you could die. And my prayer is that if that comes to us, and it might that we do see the glory of the birth.

Heather: Andrew, thank you so much. This is such an incredibly amazing conversation that it will be ongoing. but for now, due to time. Sheri, can we end with you? Last thoughts from you before we wind down here.

**Sherri:** Thank you. Heather. I believe that a number of speakers have talked about us needing a new conversation, of us needing a new reality, of us needing a new world. And I'm very conscious of the fact that I am the only non-Christian it appears on the panel, and that the conversation has been quite Christian centric. I see Andrew shaking his head. No. but one of the things that I think we need to think about is this time orientation. And so, the time orientation for Western culture is very linear and for indigenous people, we are not time oriented people.

We are spatially oriented people believing that time moves around us rather than away from us, forward or backward. which gives us access to all of these things simultaneously and, recognizing that, the dilemma that we have when we're thinking about hierarchical structures of leadership and evolution of consciousness, leads people to believe in this false sense of superiority that we have moved beyond something to something else, when actually we're circling around it and it comes over and over and over again.

it's not this linear progression. And so if we want to be able to have conversations that move us beyond the status quo, we have to be willing to have conversations that incorporate other ways of knowing, other ways of seeing, and other ways of being in relationship with one another and with the rest of life. And I hope that we can continue to engage in conversations like these, to allow the spaciousness for people to offer something that is more meaningful than a sound bite. Because we are being bombarded with negative messaging; messages of hate and division. When we come together to have conversations like this, where we're reduced to soundbites so that we can't actually offer people the nourishment that they're seeking, we don't have the time to meaningfully engage and discuss the things that need our attention.

And so how do we change and move beyond the status quo if we continue to behave in ways that keep us entangled with and incapable of being able to move beyond that? One of the things I'm writing about in my new book is the mythology of movements, rather than actually moving us beyond the status quo. We're actually just further entangling ourselves over and over again, deeper and deeper into the status quo, making it impossible for us to extricate ourselves from these systems that are controlling us and creating all of this division without harming the many.

So how do we remain wild in these times that are trying to corral us into little technocratic windows where we are easily controlled? The thing we need right now is to put our roots deep into the earth and to grow wild. The more wild the better, because we're less able to be controlled in that way. And so I'm hoping that we can continue to talk about these things and come together and lead with our hearts being above our heads.

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