



Spirit of Midsummer—Spirit of Light!

*Templar inter-branch conference celebrates heart and kernel
of the Anthroposophical Society—sister-brotherhood*

On the last Saturday of June 2010, friends and members from five states, representing four groups and branches of the Anthroposophical Society USA, convened in Hershey, Pennsylvania for The Corps de Michael's 4th Annual Inter-Branch Conference and St. John's Festival. The midsummer conference festivities resounded with the theme, *Knights Templars: Past, Present, and Future!*

Warm and enthusiastic welcomes from the registrar and *sweetest Michaelites on earth* were soon followed by the Michaelic Courage verse and the resounding of a Biodynamic gong. Friends and representatives from Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin introduced themselves along with individual aspirations for the weekend. Next, we turned to a thoroughly researched presentation by Mark Peura focusing on the navy of the Knights Templars. Mark's personal naval experience served as a springboard to clarify and elucidate the capabilities of the Templar Navy. We considered these capabilities in light of Rudolf Steiner's indications that the Templar Knights had contact with America some two centuries before Christopher Columbus! (1) Mark's presentation provided a reasoned framework for the presence of "**Templars in America**" leaving open the possibility of further follow-up and development at next year's conference.



After a short break we reconvened in the Michael Room to hear something of what is living in groups and branches across America. The conference initiative group extends many heartfelt thanks to friends and representatives convening in Hershey to celebrate group and branch life! We heard enlivened reports offered by Martha Grib on behalf of Albert Steffen Group (Pittsburgh), Don Frymyer on behalf of Corps de Michael (Hershey), Richard Swerling on behalf of Raphael Branch (Baltimore), and LoAnn Olin on behalf of Sangre de Cristo Group (Santa Fe, New Mexico). For report details please watch for a forthcoming issue of *Shining Waters*. In these vignettes of group life one could discern a modern metamorphosis of the Templar and Rosicrucian Brotherhoods. The great ideal of service to others—exemplified by the Knights Templars and Brothers of the Rose Cross—becomes a fundamental pillar of group life in the Anthroposophical Society. We attend meetings not out of merely personal interest in the topic, but out of interest in, and service to, one's fellow human beings. At the dedication of a new group

at Dusseldorf, 15th June 1915, Rudolf Steiner calls for a higher form of community founded in the freedom of knowledge born of Michael (Spirit of the Age). Bonds of blood, nation, class, ethnicity, and the like are transformed through strivings towards higher knowledge: *Our aim is to call together human beings who resolve to be sisters and brothers, and above whom hovers something that they strive to develop by cultivating spiritual science, feeling the good spirit of sister-brotherhood hovering over and above them.* As early as 23rd November 1905, in remarks published as Brotherhood & the Struggle for Existence, **Steiner referred to the main principle and aim of the Anthroposophical Society: to create the heart, the kernel, of a sister-brotherhood based on all-embracing human love that transcends, race, sex, profession, religion, and so on.** He added that *brotherhood is the noblest fruit of deep inner cognition.* Towards this aim and to reaffirm the modern mission of group and branch work, Susquehanna Corps de Michael – *Anthroposophical Society in Hershey* has offered four consecutive inter-branch conferences as both modest follow-up to, and spirit continuance of, the national group and branch conferences formerly offered by the Anthroposophical Society in America (2002, 2003, & 2004).

A native of Africa and life-long student of utopian communities, June Oriel Lang offered an inspired presentation, **“Temple Mysteries of Prester John.”** The hallowed and mysterious priest king of a utopian community in the East of Africa, Prester John can be considered in conjunction with King Arthur (Sun Mysteries revealed to the day consciousness of the head) and King Parzival (ephemeral soul-sustained community of the heart). Prester John signifies the future development of forces presently slumbering in the depths of will-life. His kingdom belongs primarily to the future, to the sixth post-Atlantean epoch when secrets of the Temple of Solomon will be revealed in connection with Philadelphia – epoch and City of Brotherly Love. (2) The St. John’s Festival arrives at the height of midsummer in a ‘Triumph of Light’ and offers a harbinger of this coming spiritual community. The traditional St. John’s Bonfire occurs after dusk. Arising out of the darkness of night (emblem of the present imperviousness of the will to everyday consciousness), we experience the light of the bonfire: betokening the will’s eventual illumination through spirit knowledge and applied practical strivings.

Founded in 1119 A.D, at or near the site of the ancient Temple of Solomon, the Knights Templars included a depiction of the Salomonic temple on the reverse side of their seal. The continuing in connection with the St. centuries ago when the real world knightly quest for community which the existing primarily in the Nevertheless, Templar roads leading to the Holy confirmed as the brave African locale of Prester John.



significance of the Templars John’s Festival began warrior monks undertook a Prester John – a utopian Templars understood as spiritual world. courage on the dangerous Lands was strengthened and knights drew near the east In this much sought after

realm, poverty is eliminated, all have jobs, and leaders bow in humility to the people. (3) Templar strivings to incarnate this ideal in practical life – a light shining out of the darkness of Kali Yuga – continue into the present day and were elucidated by David Lenker in his conference address, “Templar Courage Comes of Age.”

Our potluck supper was blessed by the “Hershey Grace” composed by Krishna Wooby, a founding student of the Lancaster (now Susquehanna) Waldorf School. The West Lawn was enlivened by bright yellow tablecloths punctuated with red roses and artful origami spiral centerpieces created by Bernadette Warman and her son, Paul, a student at Susquehanna Waldorf School. Although it was no easy task to break-up continuing dinner conversations and enlivened Michaelic community spirit, we eventually transitioned indoors to the Michael Room. In this lazured meeting space we opened evening activities with singing of the Templar anthem (*NON NOBIS DOMINE NON NOBIS, SED NOMINI TUO DA GLORIAM; Not for us, O Lord, not for us, but to Thy Name give the glory*) followed by formal recognition of groups and branches present.

As applause and hurrahs for the varying groups subsided, we turned to the evening’s keynote, “**Templar Courage Comes of Age.**” David offered indications for a Michaelic renewal of the Temple of Solomon – a key for self transformation in the current age of the consciousness soul and harbinger of a future form of community life. Additionally, David suggested a metamorphosis of Templar courage: from a quality of the soul displayed by valiant knights on the battlefield...to a cultural impulse ‘coming of age’ through far-reaching social experiments and an economy that serves others. He suggested, for example, that American Liberty can be traced to a deed of Templar courage executed in service of Rosicrucian ideals. It was a world historic significant moment when William Penn, son of a British knight, extended his hand in peace, brotherhood, and friendship to Native Americans at Shackamaxon (near Philadelphia). By this bold and courageous deed, Penn established a far-reaching utopia – *The Holy Experiment* – as spirit-seed of American Freedom and New World cosmopolitanism. Through *The Holy Experiment* (barely mentioned in modern history texts), the idealized kingdom of Prester John experienced a modern and practical manifestation; coming one step closer to ultimate realization. The full illustrated manuscript of “**Templar Courage Comes of Age**” can be ordered by writing: thecorpsdemichael@yahoo.com



Following David’s address, Richard Swerling of the Raphael Branch (Baltimore) memorialized the enduring legacy of the Temple of Solomon with a heartwarming tale of two brothers. Richard then led us in an ancient Hebrew song, *HINE MAH TOV*, or *How Good It Is!* Richard’s tale prepared us in heart and soul for the festival and conference crescendo, a gargantuan bonfire-on- the-meadow! The reputation of Corps de Michael and Stonehaven Farm (Founded 1737)

for magnificent bonfires, with flames reaching upwards of 20 to 50 feet and embers ascending to heavenly realms far beyond, did not disappoint!

The next morning Class Holder Bernard Wolf offered Class Lesson XI for members of the School of Spiritual Science as a deepening of our conference contemplations. Following a short break, we reconvened by singing the Templar anthem, *NON NOBIS DOMINE...* and heard remarks by David Lenker, "**Echoes of Midnight Sun Mysteries in Central Pennsylvania.**" This presentation served to inwardly prepare us for the deed of an afternoon group excursion to nearby Ephrata – extant site of Colonial America's largest Rosicrucian inspired community. David suggested that Ephrata's 'Midnight Watch Service' affords a New World echo of esoteric experiences of the Midnight Sun in the ancient mystery centers. (4) Ephrata was founded in 1732 by Conrad Beissel, who obtained spiritual asylum in *The Holy Experiment* following his persecution in Europe. Ephrata is widely considered the benchmark and beginning of utopian community experiments in America. David delineated three approaches to utopia: 1) the idle pipe dream that has no basis or connection with real life (luciferic perversion); 2) the socialist or communist ordering of society to gradually replace spirit individuality with indifferent 'cogs in a machine' (ahrimanic perversion); and 3) the realization of spirit ideals through community life or, 're-building the Lost Temple.' Towards this end, Rudolf Steiner referred to Sir Thomas More's Utopia as a *wonderful work full of genius and ingenuity.* (Dornach, 1 October 1916).

An early student of the work of Jacob Boehme (the 'Great Theosopher'), Ephrata's founder inaugurated such spiritual practices as the midnight watch and the washing of the feet. To this day, through terms of the 1941 deed transferring the property from the successors of Ephrata celibates to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, such practices as the washing of the feet (inaugurated centuries earlier) continue at the Ephrata Cloisters by special arrangement. Originally known as *Efrata* – Hebrew name for the region of Christ's birth – Sisters and Brothers lived in anticipation of a Paradise to be inaugurated at any moment by His Second Coming. Acknowledged as *The Holy Experiment's* 'crown jewel', *Efrata's* largest worship hall was named in honor of the



ancient site of the Temple of Solomon, "Mount Zion." (5)

Prior to departing for *Efrata*, conference participants reflected on the weekend and offered preliminary plans for next year's inter-branch theme and excursion. Following a Hebrew grace, we celebrated the weekend's warm

community spirit by sharing a buffet catered by "A Passage to India." The Indian buffet

included such delectable dishes as: shahi paneer (the food of kings), palak paneer (spinach entree), basmati rice, and wondrous mango custard. For some, the Indian cuisine provided a flashback to an earlier national conference in Harrisburg/Hershey. In 2003, “A Passage to India” catered the Anthroposophical Society’s 2nd National Group and Branch Conference hosted by The Corps de Michael on the banks of the shining Susquehanna River. Gratefully, the red roses, sun yellow tablecloths, and artful origami spiral centerpieces were as fresh at noontime as they were for the prior evening’s potluck. The varying colors of the centerpieces provided a rainbow accoutrement to the delightful cuisine and heart-warmed conversation!

In Ephrata, we were most fortunate to hear an excellent tour presentation. Nick distinguished himself by daring to articulate Beissel’s mystical conception of marriage as well as associated esoteric aspects of the community. Our tour culminated in the Sisters’ worship hall where the ‘Midnight Watch Service’ was conducted each evening at midnight for celibate Sisters of *Efrata*. A similar service was conducted simultaneously for *Efrata* Brothers in a worship hall that no longer stands. Sunday services were conducted at Mount Zion for Sisters *and* Brothers as well as the extended Ephrata community, who were active in the Sisters’ and Brothers’ printing press, paper mill, ink works, leather tanning, farmlands, and independent Latin Academy. Today, the Sisters’ hall provides a sacred setting for annual concerts featuring music composed by Beissel for the midnight watch. Focusing on the etheric quality of tone, these compositions serve to loosen the soul from the body. Prior to returning to Hershey and *the sweetest place on earth*, our entourage stopped for old fashioned sodas, authentic Pennsylvania Dutch apple dumplings, and similar refreshment at “The Udder Choice” – an ice cream parlor with a soaring ceiling, whose impressive wooden timbers echoed both the interior of a typical Pennsylvania barn, and the hallowed meeting halls of *Efrata*.

The Spirit of Midsummer – a Spirit of Light – prevailed in the awe-inspiring crescendo of Saturday night’s bonfire-on-the-meadow whilst organic heifers lowed nearby. We close this report of the 4th Annual Inter-Branch Templar Conference and St. John’s Festival with a poem by a Susquehanna Waldorf School parent, Timothy James Warman. A resident of nearby Maytown, Pennsylvania, Tim memorialized the weekend highlight at Stonehaven:

St. John's Tide Eve

*Upon this night, we settle about— our hopes rising like the patient moon.
We are one, a flame reaching towards heaven, touching the wind.
Our work is still before us as the journey calls, our lives are not embers, but sparks
spiraling northward like tiny nymphs. We dance among the trees in silence finding the
light as it spreads across the fields, out against a screen of sky, flumes of smoke flicker
and throw back the grey veil of our dreams, for it is in the heat of our hearts, we are
passing the torch to another world and leaping across the fire into the future.*

David Lenker, Bernadette Warman, and Don Frymyer
(for the)
Initiative Group
Susquehanna Corps de Michael – *Anthroposophical Society in Hershey*
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1. Virginia Sease and Manfred Schmidt-Brabant, *Paths of the Christian Mysteries* (Forest Row, Sussex: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2003) p. 50
2. Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985) p. 157.
3. Evelyn Francis Capel and Ralph Shepherd, *Invisible Africa* (Cape Town: Novalis Press, 1996) pp. 64 and 80.
4. For Rudolf Steiner's description of the Midnight Sun in the ancient mystery centers see: *Karmic Relationships, Volume II* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1974) pp. 230-31.
5. Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) p. 118.

