

# Love Is What Carries Us

## **Paying Attention to What Is Emerging**

Ever since religious life emerged as a lived expression of the gospel in response to the needs of the society of that era, we, as women and men in communities, have been in the continual process of opening to new horizons. This opening has been what has given momentum, hope and vitality to us and we hope, to our world over the years. When for periods of history the motivating energy in religious life was security and adherence to external norms, we lost our personal fire, our original purpose. Always someone or some societal crisis rose up to call us again to our primal integrity.

Recently, in an online course called, *Transformation of Business, Society and Self*, the 27,000 participants world-wide were asked to reflect on what wants to die in themselves and in their organisations and what wants to emerge or be born? It seems to me that these have been guiding questions for us as religious congregations in a very intentional way over the past 50 years. They are not theoretical questions. We have been testing them on the ground of our lives. We are always in a process of letting something die and of letting the new come.

## **A New Global Sense**

What has been consistently emerging among us is the reality that our neighbourhood, our context is the world. We are experiencing a new global consciousness and have opened ourselves to partnerships and relationships with each other that express our essential communion with all life on this breathing planet we call home.

For some of us this has meant opening International Centres; we have recognised that we have a powerful network of congregations across the globe; we have taken the initiative to set up NGOs at the United Nations so that our collective voice might influence the trajectory of policy at the international level; we have explored and taken into ourselves that the integral gospel work of justice must go to the root and disentangle long-held patterns of exclusion; we have opened ecology centres and have shifted the focus of our retreat work so that we are integrating the stirrings in our personal lives and the stirrings in the world and know that they all come from one Source.

We have come to recognise that being women and men who steep ourselves in the gospel means that we also steep ourselves in being citizens of the world. We see ourselves as participants with others in living our lives such that we share “*the passion to make and make again where such unmaking reigns.*” [Adrienne Rich in *Natural Resources from Dreams of a Common World*]

Those of us involved in working with refugees, in poverty work, in food security issues know that what happens in one corner of our village or city is connected to every other part of the planet. Social media has been a great ally in helping us to care about the good of the whole in the way we plan, the way we pray and in the choices we are making personally and with others.

In his *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People*, Pope Francis uses phrases like practising the gospel, new ways of bringing newness of the gospel to every culture and corner of society, being present in the midst of conflict and tension, living the mysticism of encounter, practising the virtue of hope and finding ways to create alternate spaces are realities that we know. These words from Pope Francis mirror our lived experience and conscious choices to immerse

ourselves in all that is the stuff of life. Furthermore he states: "I also expect from you ... to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries ... A whole world awaits us."

### **A Shift toward Being**

A new growth that I think is emerging within us is that we are giving priority to being in a way that is different. What was compelling about Jesus was his way of being, a growing level of consciousness in him that would not accept the imagined boundaries between people as real. His very human life engaged with others. The core energy of love continued to animate his life in the midst of all that could have overwhelmed and depleted him.

Perhaps this priority on being is calling us at this time to bear more, to enter into true suffering even as we release the "joy of the gospel." As we grieve with members who enter into the shadowy regions of dementia; as we face the daily tragedies and also the joys of lives displayed across our newscasts; as we both delight and struggle in collaborating with others, it is at a level of being that we experience these things.

Every problem is a problem of consciousness and every solution is an opening to a new level of consciousness. This insight by philosopher Steve McIntosh sheds light on what has been happening in us. We have been shifting over the years from an impulse to fix what is wrong to one of being with, from changing systems as if they existed outside ourselves to seeing change of self and systems as one integrated whole. The language we might have used in the past is giving way to new understandings. These shifts are profound. We are no longer simply tinkering.

Perhaps our call at this time in our history is to give time and space with others to allow a new consciousness to come to light and to keep waking us up. In this process, old separations will fall away. Together, in this light, we will begin to see outmoded ways of thinking and acting. The new can then emerge more fully.

There is among us a willingness and even a powerful attraction to what will most release love in our own lives and to recognise love already present in our world. Its absence then falls into sharp relief.

Love it what carries us  
For it is always there,  
Even in the dark, or especially in the dark,  
But shining out at times  
Like gold stitches in a piece of embroidery.  
*[Wendell Berry, poet and farmer from his novel Hannah Coulter]*

### **A New Consciousness Is Coming to Light**

These decades since Vatican II have challenged us; they have been exhilarating; they have been chaotic. The old word purification seems to fit. In this struggle, a new consciousness has been coming to light. Knowing that love is what carries us moves us into a future that is not yet seen and yet is to be deeply trusted.

Creating this future, congregations are very intentionally partnering with others who will lead the way into the future; some have set up bursaries to give younger people the training and skills needed to be all they can be in creating a more compassionate world; some are appreciating

that still women and men are attracted to the original fire of who we are; some are planning the sharing of their resources as a way of “blessing the future.”

Multiple are the ways and strong is our impulse to seed the future. Essentially, we know that we are not finished yet. With the help of good thought partners and theologians we are challenging our thought patterns and usual assumptions with a new clarity. We are reclaiming love as the heart of who we are because we know that God is love.

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