

Mystical Spirituality
Living a Politics of Communion and
an Economics of Solidarity

In the *Eucharistic Letter*, Jean-Pierre Médaille invites the early Sisters of St. Joseph to reflect on the meaning and purpose of the congregation by focusing on the presence and activity of the Risen Christ in their life and their society. In this letter, all of us are called to explore, in our daily living, "the mystery of union"—the intermingling of love of God and love of neighbour.

Where are the "energy spots" (the intense points of connection) between what God is doing within me and what God is doing in Earth Community?

And how is God calling me to respond?

"You who let yourselves feel: enter the breathing that is more than your own. Let it brush your cheeks as it divides and rejoins beside you."

From *Sonnets to Orpheus, Part One, IV* — Rainer Maria Rilke

Contemporary science tells us that all of life flows from the same source. All of creation emerges from that incredible cosmic event that is often called the Big Bang, and so all of creation is connected at its most basic level. In Christian theology, we explore the "mystical body of Christ" as one way of reflecting on the meaning, depth and implications of this interconnectedness. It helps us touch the graced call to risk living communion, however feebly and inconsistently, so that, through God, our eyes might be opened slowly to the Great Communion in which we already exist with God, earth, earth entities and all people.

"The whole world just got thick Again with God."

From *And Acting So Cool* — Hafiz

Teilhard de Chardin suggested that human beings are nothing less than evolution becoming conscious of itself. But our consciousness is both graced and wounded. Even as we are growing into an ever-deeper appreciation of our unity with the whole earth community, we are painfully aware that we live in a global community that is too often being shaped, at very fundamental levels by relationships of rivalry, control and exclusion—all of which are dominant assumptions in the current model of corporate-led globalization. We have all been socialized into unhelpful ways of understanding our relationships with the earth and each other. Through mystical spirituality, we are awakened to the need to live out of a deeper human consciousness if we are to participate in the Communion into which God is drawing us.

"One of the spiritual difficulties in our situation is the inner connection between [corporate-led] globalization and individualization. The more globally the market economy structures itself, the less interest it demonstrates in the social and ecological webs in which humans live."

Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, p.191.

The narratives of corporate-led globalization suggest that the world economy can grow its way out of both poverty and ecological damage such as climate change. But when we look at Earth Community through the lens of a spirituality of communion, we see that the focus on endless economic expansion is tearing earth community apart. Today's economic growth is generating inequality and insecurity, with most of the growth in wealth going into a very few pockets.

"Somewhere around 1980, we humans crossed an evolutionary threshold: the burden we place on the life support systems of the planet passed beyond the sustainable limit.

David Korten, *The Great Turning*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2006, p. 58.

Inequality and Earth Community sustainability are incompatible because, on the one hand, wealthy individuals and societies are living patterns of wasteful extravagance (for example in the way we use water, fossil fuels, and other sources of energy) while, on the other hand, those who are struggling to survive are making desperate choices that also have detrimental effects of Earth Community. Both patterns have ominous ecological implications.

More than 1.2 billion people now struggle to survive on less than \$1 a day. Some 2.8 billion, nearly half the world's population, survive on less than \$2 per day [...] It is estimated that 1.7 billion people — 27% of humanity — currently enjoy the material affluence of the consumer society. The demands of the existing consumer society continue to surge as its tastes turn to ever larger cars and homes. It would take at least an additional three to four planets to support the excluded populations of the world at the current European standard. The human species is quite literally consuming the future of its children. David Korten, *The Great Turning*, p.67

Indeed, the two core justice issues of our time – poverty and climate change – highlight the need for fundamental changes that are deeply rooted in the transformation of our attitudes and assumptions as well as our practices and policies. One of the more basic assumptions that needs to be challenged today is our idea of progress.

"Growth has become the system's never-ending quest, yet much of what passes for growth now reflects counter-productive, even harmful and destructive trends."

Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, p. 19.

Currently, our most frequently used notion of progress is the Gross National Product but it is a narrow economic indicator that ignores how the wealth of a society is distributed and takes no notice of whether this economic activity is linked with negative social patterns such as violence or with ecological damage. However, very slowly, a consensus is growing around the world about the need to develop a more comprehensive view of progress. We need a fuller, richer measure of progress, one that integrates social, cultural, political, ecological and economic factors to create a realistic sense of what contributes to healthy communities.

“God’s economy is God’s life with us [...] God’s whole energy is devoted to redistributing the goods of the earthly economy into the divine economy [which promises] the life of true communion among all human beings and all creatures.”

Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991, pp. 381.

Around the world, various groups are creating Integrated Approaches to Community Sustainability. These projects identify a wide range of indicators to measure the sustainability and well-being of communities including, to mention a few examples, such diverse elements as the vitality of eco-systems, access to health care, food security and adequate shelter, the gap between rich and poor, the health and well-being of individuals, the level of civic engagement, the level of well-being for future generations and the presence of leisure time. In Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (which is still being developed) will be one example of an integrated approach to community sustainability.

How, in my daily living, can I support this transition to a fuller notion of progress and community sustainability?

What might it mean for me, in the local community in which I live?

How might this affect my assumptions, my conversations, my actions?

“The mystical experience of God [...] arises from the concrete situation and necessarily returns to it: transforming, acting, suffering.” Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, p. 146.

Mystical spirituality is about awakening to the communion in which we already exist. It call for attentiveness to the activity of Love and Justice in the midst of our everyday relationships so that we might move, through grace, toward the fullness of this communion. It touches our relationship with God, with self, and with all those with whom we live Earth Community. We all exist in the Great Communion.

“The Arc of the Universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

Martin Luther King

In order to live out the meaning and purpose of our life as fully as possible, we need to be grounded in a mystical consciousness that can actively shift our personal, social, economic, political and ecological foundations, moving us:

- from a sense of myself as an separate individual to a sense of my profound connection to all in the Earth Community.
- from a belief that the Earth belongs to humans to the awareness that, as God's creatures, we belong to Earth Community.
- from finding our security in relationships of control to finding joy in relationships of shared power and partnership
- from living patterns of rivalry and exclusion to the engagement of justice issues for the common good, active citizenship and the flourishing of Earth Community.

"Earth, isn't this what you want? To arise in us, invisible? Is it not your dream, to enter us so wholly there's nothing left outside us to see? What, if not transformation, is your deepest purpose? Earth, my love, I want that too. Believe me, no more of your spring times are needed to win me over—even one flower is more than enough."

(Ninth Duino Elegy — Rainer Maria Rilke

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