

Mystical Wisdom – The Spirit Beckoning CCA, April 2023

Five contemporary experiences are the context in which I want to move around and converse because I think there is a relationship between them and the vulnerability we CCA Carmels are experiencing.

The failure of globalization
 The pandemic
 Mass migration
 Racism and white supremacy
 Magnitude of the universe

1.The failure of globalization (David Brooks: *Globalization is Over*, NYT 4/12/22)

Our dreams for collaboration and cooperation have shattered. The vision of global convergence around a set of universal values — freedom, equality, personal dignity, pluralism, human rights - has not been realized. We witness instead the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism and the vulnerability of democracy here and abroad. Racism is rearing its head with alarming boldness. Gun violence is an everyday occurrence. Rising national and international conflicts frighten us. War is a heart-breaking reality. Our earth home is in peril from climate disaster. Deepest of all is a movement away from, contrary to, any type of communion among us Americans, us humans, or with the earth, our Home, our Place in the universe.

There was an optimistic view of how history would evolve, a vision of progress and convergence. The world is not converging anymore; it's diverging with all the harmful effects we experience. Humanity, the cutting edge of evolution, is blocking, resisting, the next stage of human consciousness, the stage of communion and relationality. We are stuck in autonomy and individualism, resistant to self-transcendence and concern for the common good.

2.The experience of the pandemic

On the one hand:

The vulnerability of humanity on this planet earth – over 6,908,554 confirmed Covid Deaths in the world, April 22, 2023; 763,465,580 reported cases.

So much sickness and loss on so many levels
 People confined, displaced from ordinary society
 Separation, isolation, deprivation of relatedness, loneliness
 Our Planet Earth, our Place, our Home, infected
 Conflict and politicizing of vaccines, masks, lock-down
 The polarizing effects of a culture of lies

On the other hand:

The human capacity for self-sacrifice and self-transcendence
 An unexpected expansion in our experience and understanding of *presence*
 New possibilities for fostering a web of communion (a new globalization?)
 The value, the place, the preciousness of listening and inclusion and deep desire for it

3. The mass migration of peoples and the destruction and loss of home, place, security, life,
 because of war, climate change, persecution, dictatorships, violence, genocide, earthquakes,
 fires and floods and tornados, and because of the human destruction of our earth home.
 Migrants at our borders, migrants dying in overcrowded boats, the children, the children ---

So, the experience of Displacement and the importance of Place, of Home

Commonweal 2023: *The Great Displacement caused by climate change*
 JRS/USA April 2023 newsletter: *Climate Displacement continues to disrupt lives worldwide.*

Renee Hirschon sees ‘the enduring and pervasive longing for home’ as being a most significant factor in the experience of displacement, of those who are long-term exiles from home.¹

4. This brings us to Racism

Today, in these troubled, soul-wrenching times, we are so conscious that Calvary is the only Place, white America has allotted to our black brothers and sisters since our nation’s beginnings – enslaved, crucified people, thousands upon thousands, year after year, century after century. David Truer, a member of the Native American Ojibwe (or Chippewa) tribe, writing in an article entitled *The Magic Mountains of the Acoma Pueblo and Thomas Mann* in the *New York Review*, July 6, 2020, reminds us,

¹ Renee Hirschon, “Enduring Bonds of Place: Personhood and Loss of Home”, in Raudvere, *Nostalgia, Loss and Creativity in South East Europe*, 23. Hirschon is quoted in Esther De Waal, *The White Stone, The Art of Letting Go* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021), 8.

For people of color, America has for centuries been an inhospitable mountain [place] on which we toil and in whose cold shadow we live.

Truer tells how he visited Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico where the Pueblo people have been living atop their mountain, a three hundred fifty-seven-foot Mesa, for over a thousand years. He writes about his encounter with Brian Vallo, the governor of Acoma:

Vallo touched something in me when he talked about The Rock, [the Mesa], and the Pueblo's relationship to it that feels true of my tribe and my community, but perhaps not true of the rest of America. We see ourselves as from a certain place much more powerfully and much more often than we think of ourselves as individuals. We are the people of our homelands, [our place,] that is who we irreducibly are. So, it makes sense that we have a more pronounced sense of common purpose ... than other people who are trained to put more stock in individualism and individual rights.

But Native Americans, our Indigenous Peoples, were denied their place over and over again. This makes the recent though long overdue announcement of the Department of the Interior, June 18, 2022, thrilling:

Bears Ears National Monument, whose red-rock landscape sprawls across more than 1.3 million acres in southeastern Utah, will be managed jointly by the federal government and Native American tribes in what administration officials said represents a "one-of-a-kind" model of cooperation.

The arrangement to preserve the national monument was ratified in an agreement (that was signed on Saturday) and commemorated with the unveiling of a new Bears Ears welcome sign, which includes the insignia of the five tribes that will help run the monument

The Zuni Pueblo tribe, the Hopi, the Navajo Nation, the Ute Mountain Tribe, and the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation had all been driven off this land at some point. Carleton Bowekaty, the lieutenant governor of the Zuni Pueblo tribe, said in the statement.²

Today, instead of being removed from a landscape [place] to make way for a public park, we are being invited back to our ancestral homelands to help repair them.

² Mr. Bowekaty is the co-chair of the Bears Ears Commission, a group that also includes representatives of four other tribes that at some point were driven off the land: the Hopi, the Navajo Nation, the Ute Mountain Tribe, and the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.

The interior secretary, Deb Haaland, the first Indigenous [US] cabinet secretary, fought back tears as she applauded the administration's actions for "bending the arc of the moral universe toward justice" This is my homeland." "There are some pretty amazing ruins there, and, you know, I don't even like to call them ruins The spirit of the people never leaves [their place]."

We Carmelites must hear with special resonance the call of indigenous peoples, of people of color, for a full "place" in America's life and wealth and bounty. So many of our communities have been defined by place. (Concord Carmel, Barrington Carmel, Santa Clara Carmel, Hong Kong Carmel, etc.) And for over eight hundred years we Carmelites have been defined by a place both real and mythical in its significance: Mount Carmel. We are accountable to our past, our tradition. We who know the importance of place are doubly accountable to the present and even more to God's good future, God's dream for humanity, "acting now in light of what will be," as Bryan Massingale has said so eloquently. Place and Dis-placement

5.The cosmic vision of unimaginable magnitude revealed to us by the John Webb telescope

Thrilling, magnificently beautiful, overwhelming, unimaginable in its magnitude, an opening into staggering Mystery. But this is a kind of deepening displacement of our individualism and our earth-space. While we are drawn to live into the communion the absolute, undeniable interconnected wholeness the Cosmos reveals, and the continuing awakening and evolution of the Universe, we are confounded by our "insignificance" and by the fragility, the minuteness, of our earth home and of us humans.

I have outlined a complex milieu, experiences of "dis-placement" on numerous levels, in which the vulnerability of our communities and what I want to call our loss of "place" is embedded. I want to try to relate this experience, this loss of place, to mystical wisdom and dark night, transformation and (theological) hope or "Spirit beckoning", as I see them developing in our Carmels, in CCA communities and members, and certainly also in active religious communities of men and women. I want to see what relationship our vulnerability and loss of place has to

humanity's situations of loss, displacement, and brokenness, and to the transformation of human consciousness and the on-going evolution and awakening of the Universe.

Can we look at the vulnerability of Carmels and CCA against this backdrop, within this context?

Aging members, dwindling numbers, fewer new members

Today many of our sisters are dis-placed because of illness or debilitation associated with aging and/or because of the closing of their Carmels.

We see the marginalization of the elderly with our sisters living their elder years in unexpected places and dying away from "home". This worries Pope Francis:

The marginalization of the elderly— both conceptual and practical – corrupts all seasons of life, not just that of old age.³

Some communities are coming or have come to "completion".

Monasteries are being sold, the community's "place" or home.

We are not alone: active communities selling Motherhouses and communities' iconic places: Wernersville, Cenacles, SSND East Coast Provincial Houses, SSJ's huge Cape May Retreat House, etc. Health Care Facilities changing hands, Catholic Colleges closing.

Some of our own communities are torn apart, members scattered in various facilities and apartments.

Some living within active communities' motherhouses

Some affiliating with active communities in a covenant relationship

We have the whole painful processes of *affiliation* and *Incardination*.

Some sisters transferring to other Carmels, or incardinating with another Carmel, and the enormous challenge of mutual adjustment and acceptance going on right now in our communities. Adjustment for communities as well as for individuals that is not over in a month or even a year.

³ Wednesday audience, June 1, 2022

Migration and displacement!!

There is a loss of “place” for us Carmelites for whom place has been so important.

We have been known by our place, a very stable place.

In some small way - small because I dare not make the comparison – yet mirroring to us what is going on worldwide in the traumatic migration and displacement of peoples. Identifying us with migrants displaced by war, violence, hunger and starvation, pandemic, economy, aging. Millions are losing their place - migrants all over the world, not like this since WWII. Also, with those made homeless and townless by floods, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, catastrophic weather patterns affected by climate change. People losing everything.

Mirroring to us other persons in our own country who are seeking their rightful place: African Americans owed a place long denied them; Indigenous Peoples wanting and deserving their Place(s) stolen from them.

We are marked by our place, our homes, our monastery. They have shaped us and we in turn have shaped them. “Place is the fabric of our lives; memory and identity are stitched through it.” Monasteries have a life force and offer more than just shelter. “They offer security and a sense of sanctuary.”⁴ Our monasteries have given us stability for they have been a continuing presence in our lives. They have had their own persona. They hold our memories, personal and communal, our traditions, in their arms.⁵ Some reach back more than 100 years, some further, ours 233 years. Rootedness matters.

Here was a place that was permanent, on which we could depend, (always awaiting our return, always there to welcome us, whatever we had been doing, wherever we had been.) It was the ground base of all our journeying It was the place from which [we] came and went.⁶

⁴ De Waal, op. cit., 2 and footnote 6.

⁵ Ibid., 8

⁶ Ibid., 5, 13

*Long did I build you, oh house!
 With each memory I carried stones
 From the bank to your upmost wall.
 And I saw your roof mellowed by time
 Changing as the sea
 Dancing against a background of clouds
 With which it mingled its smoke.⁷*

Even more, our Carmels have been centers of unity and prayer for us and for those who surround us and participate in our life - calling them to interiority. Today they are becoming a powerful symbol of all that is happening around us. I don't think we can take lightly the closing and selling of our monasteries, the community's Place, its Home, and the displacement of our sisters. This might well be a death-dealing displacement for our communities and our sisters, as well as a betrayal of our evolutionary responsibilities, unless we appreciate the significance of the personal and communal uprooting and spiritual dispossession that is occurring among us on all age levels, and the new Place, the next stage of personal and communal consciousness that beckons and is already in the making. Profound spiritual sensitivity is called for that reaches far beyond our own personal spiritual growth and particular needs and wants. New sensibilities focused on the future are called for! We have done so much together in our communities and in CCA through these past fifty-three years, but the next transformative step is huge. It is relationality without compromise. And it is Hope, fantastic, dearly bought, theological hope!

In a recent book on Howard Thurman, the African American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader,⁸ Elesha Commerse describes him as one whose life bears witness to the peace that comes from living in 'relative completion'. She writes, "Stay ready for the unexpected, including the end of life, because when you need to be ready you won't have time to get ready. You'll either be ready, or you won't. Some of the simplest and meaningful ways to do so are anchored in doing your best to

⁷ Louis Guillaume, "Maison de Vent" (Wind House) in *Noir comme la mer*, Les Lettres, 60. This is quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 84.

⁸As a prominent religious figure, Howard Washington Thurman played a leading role in many social justice movements and organizations of the twentieth century. He died in 1981.

live in a perpetual state of relative completion.” That is, ready to move on.⁹ The theme of our meeting, *Opening to an Emerging Future: Called to Transformation*, suggests our readiness to move on, and signals our realization that our present as well as our future are dependent on understanding and deepening the spiritual movement that is unfolding in and among us. Our Carmelite spirituality helps us to discern not only the immediate path ahead, but perhaps more importantly the beginning of a vision of a new PLACE for us.

What is going on? What/Who really is the mystical Wisdom, the transformation, before us in a world of continuing evolution, in an incredible universe of on-going awakening and indescribable magnitude? We remember that for OHF John+, mystical wisdom, loving wisdom, mystical theology, contemplation, and dark night are synonymous. And genuine dark night is always *an inflow of God into the soul*, or a deep though often unfelt Presence, which both refines and transforms.¹⁰ We know the dark night has two faces: purification and union. Insofar as the dark night is about purification, it is a transition, sometimes a very long transition from one stage to another; insofar as it is about union and identity, it is a new stage of growth.¹¹ Purification is always about emergence, about preparing for something: deeper interiority, new love-knowledge, closer relational identity with Jesus Christ, deeper movement into the *within-ness* of the universe, but also the loss, the leaving behind of what no longer serves ... to move on to a new stage of consciousness. I suggest that our experiences of loss, diminishment, and displacement, coupled with our openness to transformation and long

⁹ See book review in *Spiritus* by Rev. Aizaiah G. Yong of *Anchored in the Current: Discovering Howard Thurman as Educator, Activist, Guide and Prophet*, ed Gregory C. Ellison II (Louisville, Westminster: John Knox Press, 2020).

¹⁰ IIDN 5.1-2 and notes 1 and 2

¹¹ Although in our heightened awareness of white privilege, racism and white supremacy, there might be a question about using the classical symbol, dark night, it's beneficial to remember that in the long mystical tradition dark night is a positive experience. This footnote was added in response to some LCWR participants' resistance to dark night terminology. See Eulalio R. Baltazar, *Dark Center, A Process Theology of Darkness*, (Paulist Press, 1973).

developed desire for union with God, is slowly, even secretly, forging in us a much closer relational identity with the Risen Jesus, Holy Wisdom, and bringing about a radical transformation of both our personal and our communal selfhood, preparing us for and creating in us, in CCA, the next stage of communal consciousness - if we can live into what is happening with spiritual sensitivity. Think about, remember, John of the Cross' poetic expression of this experience:

*One dark night
fired with love's urgent longings
--ah, the sheer grace—
I went out unseen,
My house being now all stilled.*

*On that glad night, ...
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.*

*This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he waited for me
--him I knew so well—
there in a place where no one else appeared.*

*O guiding night
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved
transforming the beloved in her Lover.*

One dark night, I went out, my house all stilled - gone.
To where he waited for me...There in a Place
A PLACE - a powerful symbol.

I sense, I dare to believe, that we are being invited, better, taken to a deeper Place – the deepest Place - in the heart of Trinitarian life, invited to move on and gradually appropriate an identity that is totally relational, shaped by deepening union with/in the human and divine

Jesus Christ, the resurrected Jesus, the Cosmic Christ;¹² invited together, as a community, into the very life of God, a God whose identity is trinitarian, that is, “a God who is and is *known* only in loving, [dynamic], relationality.”¹³

This is obviously not new for us Carmelites, but a new ontology with emphasis on the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything in the cosmos is developing among some philosophers and theologians and the Trinity is coming into its own in a fresh and thrilling way due to evolutionary and cosmological developments in science revealing the deep patterns of interconnectedness and relationality in the universe. A new evolutionary direction is being given to humanity that marvelously converges with our faith in a Trinitarian God whose creative life and love underpins and empowers all creation, the entire universe, marking it, directing it, supporting it, with the pattern and movement of its (God’s) own pure relationality and communion. In this convergence of theology and science, we are being given intimations of the fulfillment, what God is bringing about. We must give ourselves over to the process of Holy Wisdom ushering us into the vibrant life of Trinitarian communion, and allow this radiant pattern, this orientation toward unassailable Relationality, to permeate and transform our consciousness, (LCWR talk) thereby making our own contribution to the continuing evolution of humanity and of our earth, and to the continuing awakening of the still unfinished Universe of which we, humans, are an inseparable, integral development or emergence. The implications of what I am suggesting are staggering for our communal lives and I’ll come back to this.

But first, we Carmelites have to believe that in the displacements, frailty, vulnerability, losses, and unravelling we are experiencing, Christ’s life in us, that is, Holy Wisdom, is taking on new depth, igniting our relational potential, luring us to greater union and communion and working in us both a deeper desire for that union and the necessary stretching of our souls so that we might be open to what the Crucified and Risen Christ, the Cosmic Christ, is trying to do in and

¹² Catherine LaCugna in her ground-breaking work put it this way: “The ultimate good of human beings is to achieve *theosis*, to realize the fullness of our humanity in the Trinity.”

¹³ Gillian Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 81. In this section I am influenced by Ahlgren’s chapter on the sixth dwelling place. I am mindful also of Teresa’s experience in the seventh dwelling place and John of the Cross’ witness toward the end of the Spiritual Canticle.

with us: bringing us into his own consciousness and thereby sharing with us his full relational life. Christ wants us to become more and more capable of holding within ourselves, as our own innermost center, his full relational life. (Think what that means!) If this is to happen, however, we must, first, be freed from the confines of our egocentric selves, and second, our personal and communal soul-boundaries, which are not evil, just limited, must be stretched and stretched. Our souls need to be broken open to embrace fully Christ and ALL with which, with whom, Christ stands in relationship, including those who are losing their place, or who have been deprived of their place, or even those who are fighting violently to hold on to their place at the cost of others.

Many are the ways in which the boundaries of selfhood and individuality are being stretched. Although we may feel undone, unraveled like a ball of yarn, we can, we must, trust God's transforming love is using everything going on in our personal and collective lives, as well as in the depths of our souls and the depths of our community's life, to eradicate such boundaries. This is gain and loss to us; we are gaining "increased relational identity and new potentiality for communion" and for life in the universe, in the realm of the Cosmic Christ, while we are losing "a selfhood predicated on individual and [community] identity and autonomy,"¹⁴ something very threatening for us.

The dark night contemplative process of mystical knowing – the displacement - results in "a complete reconfiguring of what constitutes the communal and personal soul's selfhood; it is the full realization of relationality, where self and others and the Other form a unitive process, as well as a unitive identity. This is a surrendering of selfhood, no doubt about that, but also the soul's fullest embrace of a new understanding and experience of self-in-God, self-in-others, and self-in the universe." What I am pointing to and hoping and praying for is a deeper form of

¹⁴ Ahlgren, op. cit., 84

communal personhood rooted in an actual ontological transformation, that is, communal identities that are totally relational as befitting our Place in the universe.¹⁵

When we are being painfully pulled out of ourselves and into the reality of a relational God in this contemplative way, we do experience the darkest wounds and shadows of human existential reality; an inner displacement right now mirroring the outer displacement all around us. As the boundaries of selfhood become very thin and disintegrate, our souls take into themselves human pain and suffering writ large. In accepting a greater, more universal, human identity, our souls relinquish control of their existential reality much as Christ did on the cross. (Mystics write about this. See John+ Living Flame, St. 2.) This is the Place where the deepest identification with the migrants at our border, the poor, the despised, the rejected peoples, those persons who have been deprived of their place, our African American sisters and brothers, our Indigenous Peoples, occurs - when we stand frail and unraveled and displaced with Jesus at the cross and feel with an intensity we can hardly endure all these suffering, displaced people - real, live, children and women and men - clinging to our souls. They cannot be shaken off.¹⁶ Through the shocking enormity of crucified lives, we absorb the unfathomable mystery of Jesus dying on the cross. It seems as if our powerlessness in the face of so much agony and loss, such rampant cruelty and hardheartedness, only breaks down further the protective boundaries of our souls allowing the full impact of seemingly senseless, untimely and endless displacement, suffering and death to crash in upon us.

This is the place the contemplative person/community in frailty and loss and displacement, must stay embedded in deep communion – vulnerable to the full brunt of human sinfulness, affirming the presence of God in the midst of the appalling enormity of pain and death, knowing the passion and death of Christ does give warrant for locating the compassion of God

¹⁵ Ahlgren explains it this way: "Theologically this process can be best expressed as the disintegration of forms of personhood rooted in anything less than humanity's created potential and the concurrent reintegration of personhood into human form created 'in the image of God.'"

¹⁶ See John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* 36, 11-13.

right in the center of human affliction, as Elizabeth Jonson suggests (206).¹⁷ But why do we affirm the presence of God in this Place of loss and death, assert that the passion and death of Christ give warrant for locating the compassion of God in the center of human affliction? Because in Jesus, God experienced evil from the inside. *Having tasted the dregs of betrayal, rejection and personal agony, the crucified Christ knows what it is to suffer* - and to suffer as a victim of human malice. In his own body, he knows. This is breathtaking. Only Christianity has this: the living God, in Jesus, entering *the fray, personally drinking the cup of suffering and going down into the nothingness of death to transform it from within*. (Johnson, 202, 195) By inhabiting the inside of evil with unremitting love to the very end, Jesus, the self-donation of God, brings divine life into closest solidarity with all those who suffer the same annihilating darkness. Not what we expect divinity to be! It is shocking enough that Jesus, the Incarnate Word, becomes one of history's millions of displaced, rejected victims. That he becomes one with and for them can only be explained by the unfathomable depths of God's unconditional love.¹⁸ The crucifixion situates communion in the darkest place, at the nadir of human hopelessness, and tells of unspeakable affection and solidarity flowing from the cross of Jesus to all the other cross-bearers of our world, to all the victims of human sinning and displacement. It is from this place of almost incomprehensible communion that Jesus utters his final words in St. John's Gospel: *It is finished. It is accomplished*. In Johannine theology this is a victory cry. Faithful to his identity, his being from and to his Father (Abba), Jesus loves to the very end. He thereby completes his mission, fulfills his Abba's will. Jesus' ultimate flourishing – his glorification - is in this all-embracing communion.¹⁹

The transformation of our consciousness - our communal transformation – our communal emergence - any new vision - is radically connected to the agony of all those clinging to our souls and haunting our prayer and our lives. In the dark night of mystical knowing, we must stay with Christ, in Christ, powerless, displaced, vulnerable, empty, in prayer at the cross,

¹⁷ I cannot place at this time the references to Elizabeth Johnson's writings.

¹⁸ I cannot place this reference to Jerome A. Miller's work, 19.

¹⁹ This section taken in part from a homily given on Good Friday at the Carmelite Monastery, Baltimore, by Constance FitzGerald.

absorbing from Jesus the intimate compassion that will irrevocably alter our relational identity and transform our souls. There is no other path to the heart of God than through the burning love of the Crucified Christ. (Delio/Bonaventure). Christ longs for us to join him, to be one with him, in communicating across the vast currents of human consciousness the compassion, the love, the utterly faithful, total communion, that serves as a thickening of the grace that surrounds the victims of human sin and societal failure and strengthens them in their inner depths. It is on the mysterious level of spirit that our being in communion with Christ's communion unto death matters or has any significance in amplifying grace (God's graced presence), in the mode of offer, in the deep consciousness of all those who have lost their place because of war or human violence, greed or flood or fire, or have been cruelly deprived of their place for generations. (This the Content of Dark Night of Spirit.)

The process going on among us has as its goal, as I have said, a dynamic relational ability, a shared identity, a unitive identity, nothing less than our becoming Christ's equal, Christ's self, by graced participation. All our losses and all the displacement we are experiencing are in service of our Christification, our divinization and humanization by the divine and human Christ who lives out and wants to share with us the integrity ~~and oneness-in-distinction~~ of his own relational identity: the mutual, dynamic relationships and communion and dance of Trinitarian life. Here the Place to which we are being led, not a static Place, but a spaciousness of unlimited potentiality for love, for communion, for transformation, for the continuing emergence of human consciousness. It is extremely important to realize this is not a matter of our becoming increasingly conscious of Christ in our lives, but of becoming conscious with Christ's consciousness, being brought into his selfhood and his relationships, experiencing more and more Christ as subject, not object, of our consciousness – "Christ in whom divinity and humanity and all the density of the evolving universe exist in a unified reality". (Panikkar/Delio) Consciousness defines our existence. It is the within-ness of matter and the human person is evolution becoming more and more conscious. Therefore, our alignment with the consciousness of Christ, our relational appropriation of Trinitarian love as the core energy of the universe, infuses the evolution of humanity's consciousness with powerful spiritual energy

and opens a threshold toward new direction. It is from this threshold that the prophets of communion stand forth embedded in the continuing creativity of cosmic life.

What vast energy fields of communion and interdependence would be created on this earth, in our cosmos, if our consciousness were more closely aligned with the consciousness of Jesus Christ, if his relational identity were more nearly ours, if we could share more explicitly in the all-embracing, pulsing dynamic of Trinitarian life! This union, this gift, is the goal of contemplative prayer, for which you long, and it isn't only for "eternal life," as you know so well.

This Place of "mystical wisdom" lived into, inhabited, and appropriated by our communities as a positive process of transformation is a serious critique of a self-centered, egocentric, autonomous understanding of the human person, a deconstruction of transhumanism's self-centered, individualistic epistemology,²⁰ and a communal act of resistance to a culture of violent individualism, autocratic nationalism, white supremacy, racism, and all the forces of division, exclusion, violence, and hatred that threaten democracy today and undercut humanity's movement toward solidarity and communion. This is the ultrahumanism that Teilhard foresaw would lead us into a future of more life, more being, more consciousness, and create a future oriented ethics nurturing values of communion and relatedness that gather us in, band us together, bond us together, creating a global consciousness and a cosmic heart.²¹

I wonder if you can sense, embedded in what I have said, the drastic climate change for religious life, for Carmel, for community, and for CCA in its present fragility and its scattered members? Can you? There is something missing in religious life today that marks the threshold into a prophetic future for us. A young sister said to me recently, "we mostly live side-by-side." Perhaps the eremitical side of our charism has fostered this. Our solitude, our personal prayer, is so precious and so indispensable. (And I am conscious that the pendulum swings historically.)

²⁰ Daekyung Jung, *Theology and Science*, November 2019, 524.

²¹ For a short, clear explanation of transhumanism and ultrahumanism (or Christian transhumanism), see Ilio Delio, *The Emergent Christ* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 93-98.

Yet, we do often live side-by-side, confined in our own selfhood and individuality, immersed in our private concerns, clutching our personal and community autonomy, unable to claim a deep communal relationality and free ourselves from our perception of self-separateness, unable to live in community, or in our present situation in CCA, at a depth commensurate with the relationality we come to in our prayer life. Is this the next big step in our long renewal? The New Place?

Perhaps we were not ready for this earlier, but this is the evolutionary time. Is our contemplative life deep enough, our displacement purifying enough, our mystical knowing profound enough, to break through the fear, the memories, the real or imagined hurts, the unforgiveness in our hearts, the fragility, the incompleteness, the anxiety about what we'll have to leave behind, the fear of what we will have to give, that hold us captive and keep us from experiencing the wonder and inner beauty and exquisite vulnerability of our intertwined lives?

It takes relationality to move us into the fullest forms of self-knowledge and wholeness, and self-knowledge is central in gaining a fuller knowledge of relationality. This isn't the kind of self-knowledge I gain because you tell me all my blind spots that I cannot see, but rather the yearning knowledge, at once sharp and dull, that the wholeness I desire rests now completely in an intersubjective way of being that conditions not only my will but my desires, choices, activities, orientations. Because of the intersubjective way of being that conditions it, we cannot learn the depth and beauty of ourselves or one another on our own. We are meant to be partners with God for one another in an unbroken whole. I am suggesting a new communal attention to "the within-ness" of our lives, that is simultaneously attention to the inner cosmic awakening of the entire universe, as theologian/scientist John Haught has suggested.²²

The commitment of our communities and us individually in CCA to engage in communal contemplation and "We Space" sessions are significant efforts, but boundaries of fear, lack of trust, self-separateness, and self-protection, not to mention the demands of our work in

²² John F. Haught, *The New Cosmic Story* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2017).

community, slow our pace and hold us back from this new Place, the spaciousness of relationality and deep communion. The destructive forces at work in the world and in our country demand that we do not turn away from the beckoning of the Spirit who is behind our subjectivity. This is why we can/must give ourselves and our precious time to things like our *Woman at the Well* dialogues. We thus bear witness to the truth that “we live in interwoven layers of bondedness” and give the fullest embrace to what truly is: a Quantum universe of unbroken wholeness in which everyone, everything, is interconnected and interdependent. David Bohm calls this “implicate order.”²³

This is why we cannot hold to ourselves this Place of deeper relationality. My community’s experience during the pandemic convinces me that this is a contemplative experience we must share with our people. The extreme physical separation and isolation imposed upon us and our people by Covid, as well as some of the ways we have responded to the situation, unlocked for our displaced, lonely people profound existential longings and human aspirations for deep spiritual sharing, communal contemplative prayer and growth, profound inclusion, genuine active care, and real communion, on more than superficial levels. On Zoom, through a form of weekly *Lectio Divina* we have gathered people from around the world in reading the Sunday scriptures, listening to theological input, praying with the text, and then reflecting and sharing in small groups. Some of you, our sisters, have joined these gatherings. This opportunity has been particularly helpful to some of our CCA sisters in Care facilities. In another direction, our novice, Sr. Bridget, leads a *Lectio* group of younger religious sharing regularly via Zoom. Our Sunday liturgies, online and in person, continue to embrace soul-hungry people. Our experience of weaving a strong affective circle of communion around the earth points to directions for contemplative ministry, contemplative “work”, and provides deep learnings about what constitutes real “presence”. Wherever, whenever, the human-divine relationship essential to humanity’s well-being is nurtured, and these experiences of deep communion happen among us, the transformation of humanity and the evolution of human consciousness are more assured, and the within-ness of the entire universe expands. There is something

²³ See Delio, *The Emergent Christ*, 27, 29-31.

about “heaven” in this. Almost more than humans can do – unless we are really meant to cross a threshold.

I have been intrigued for some years, as my nun students know, by *morphogenetic fields* described by British biologist, Rupert Sheldrake. He “postulated that repetitive behavior creates informational fields that can influence similar behavior in an unrelated area and are available throughout space and time without any loss of intensity once they have been created. Morphogenetic fields are unseen formative fields ... [that] direct other members of the species toward the same form or behavior, or what Sheldrake calls ‘morphic resonance’ These fields of habitual patterns link all people. The more people have a habit or pattern – whether knowledge or perception or behavior – the stronger it is in the field, and the more easily it replicates in a new person The discovery of morphogenetic fields can be used to describe how human consciousness is shared”²⁴ and how humanity crosses a critical threshold.

As I said several years ago to the LCWR members, “may we be given the contemplative grace to cut deeper grooves of conscious relationality and communion in the evolutionary path we are treading so that others may follow. May we make our own evolutionary contribution toward laying down permanent capabilities for creative communion and cutting deeper cosmic tendencies for transforming love and relationality into the universe. Prophets of communion,” of relationality! This is my dream for us, my sisters, as we face our future together. It is your dream as well, I know.

²⁴ Iliia Delio describes morphogenetic fields clearly in *The Emergent Christ*, 30-31, but there are numerous scientific sources for reading about morphogenetic fields as envisioned by Rupert Sheldrake.