



Aug 13
Dear Louise
with you
all is well
Love from Mary Louise

AUGUST 1989

AGE WISE AGE WISE

From Rachel Donders - Age 77 - P.O.B. 20760, Jerusalem, Israel

Like many readers of Age Wise I, too, enjoy meeting old friends in these pages, and I particularly liked the variety of contributions in the last issue: communications, reminiscences, reports, poetry, even the address list and the changes, they all speak to me. Mary Louise and V.J. are doing a fine job collecting and publishing, not to speak of the little notes to us. Thank you and please go on.

For a change I would like to contribute something of a somewhat theological character, theology, or rather spirituality and religion being the enduring fascination in my life. This contribution has to do with a new perspective on "aging".

"She is really aging now," we might hear someone say, or, "She has aged considerably in these last months," - and we notice in the tone of the speaker a certain concern, pity, regret, and the premonition of an "end". Indeed, aging goes on as a process, involving our whole person, till the climax (or is it the nadir?) is reached in death. And, however alive we still may feel at this moment, we are in this process.

"Death is indwelling in life," stresses Karl Barth as a true Protestant theologian. I feel reminded of that time and again, not only when considering the lingering sickness and shocking death of a beloved one, or upon hearing about the numerous fatalities in traffic accidents, wars, famines, so nearby nowadays - but also when I feel the pangs of deteriorating health, mental and physical, in my own constitution, or when I realise I have just breathlessly escaped from a moment of mortal danger!

Death is indwelling in life! A painful thought! But wait! I want to come to a quite different perspective. We ARE aging indeed, but: "Aging into the resurrection." Isn't that a wonderful way of looking at the unavoidable process? It is the title of a chapter in a booklet written by Charles Davis ("Soft Bodies in a Hard World, Spirituality for the Vulnerable", Anglican Book Centre, 1987, Toronto, Canada). This booklet says marvelous things to me. Chapter four really has renewed, or is renewing, my faith in a resurrection. I have re-worded it slightly here.

Aging into the resurrection! What is this resurrection really? For one thing, Davis explains, it is not the re-animation of a corpse. That, a re-animation, a return to a former existence, is what happened, as we are told, in the gospel stories of Lazarus and of that little daughter of Jairus. Those events are images, as even the term "resurrection of the body" is an image.

An image of what?

Of course we are now speaking in faith-language and hope-language, Christian faith- and hope-language. And faith as well as hope deal with mystery. In faith and in hope, mysteriously, we may know that we are growing - aging - through the moment of death - into a new state of existence.

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Nothing here can be proved, or verified, but still, for those who have a certain experience of God as the Source of being, of Christ as a Lover of humankind, of the Holy Spirit as the Breath of life, it is not strange to have this hope: hope for a resurrection, that is: for a new state of existence.

Even in Japan where in Shinto terms faith in an afterlife scarcely exists ("We believe we just go up in thin air!" one of my students told me, and another: "We get dissolved into the universe.") I have met young people (I mean non-Christians or rather: non-believers, just secularised) who had an intuition of some kind of personal existence after death.

But for us just an intuition, or even a personal and individual experience of a relationship with the God of life, is not the only ground of our hope in a resurrection, an 'afterlife'. We are confirmed in it through generations of Christians who have lived out the same relationship with God through Christ. Davis says: From the time when the apostles and first disciples (women, too!) were converted from their despair at Christ's death to an overwhelming conviction that He was alive and present among them, the Christian community has lived with the faith that the Risen Christ is amongst them as the source of new life and with the hope that each will share in the Lord's resurrection.

Of course in each period of time the theological approach to this "share in the Lord's Resurrection" is clothed in different terms, presented in different metaphors. With many of you I belong to those who, in this time, are greatly helped by this search for a new language through which old truths can be made relevant for us 20th century Christians. Sometimes traditional metaphors still speak to us - I think e.g. of Paul's letter to the Corinthians - but very often we do not know anymore what to make of them, far away as they are from the concepts and notions in which we have learned to think. So in this case, "coming into a new state of existence" says more to me than "the resurrection of the body."

However, there is more to it than just terminology. Life itself lived here and now is involved. Barth's statement, "Death is indwelling in life," described just a fact; we experience the truth of it almost daily. But "aging into a new state of existence" is not just a fact: it does not happen by itself. It asks for something more than acknowledgment. It asks for our collaboration, our efforts; it asks a certain way of life.

Charles Davis develops an inspiring explanation of this necessary collaboration. To begin with, he states that our "belief in a life beyond death is belief in a bodily afterlife. The resurrection is a transition into a new bodily existence." Death is not an escape from the body. But what is that body? "The body is our personal self when taken in relation to the world and to other people. We do not have bodies; we are our bodies. The body is not an appendage; it is the whole person, but seen in relationships. It is the centre of a network, linking the person to the material world, the human world, and other persons.

"We are bodies because we are the centres, the nodal points of relations and interactions, stretching out to the rest of the universe. The body is our personal self as the intersection point of cycles of activity. These cycles of activity are operative on various levels, so that the lower levels of activity are taken up into the higher, and the higher levels presuppose the lower. Thus, the biological level of activity presupposes and takes up into itself, into its own order and purpose the lower level of the laws of physics and of chemistry

"The growth of our personality in its interaction and interrelationship with others is then the emergence in sequence of cycles of psychic activities. Further: It is not difficult to conceive the spiritual life of our relationship with God as the gradual emergence of ever higher cycles of activity in a self-transcendence that opens us ever more to the heights and depths of reality.

"We can therefore think of our bodily selves as dynamic centres, with something of the structure of active spirals. Ever higher cycles of activity are opening up; other cycles are dying away. Death is a critical transition because it marks the cessation of the whole range of biological cycles of activity. But need it be the cessation of all the higher levels of activity in the bodily spiral? What we anticipate in hope is the continuance and further development of the higher levels of the spiral of our bodily selves."

And now, here comes our effort, our collaboration in the process of aging: In our day-to-day life, in our way of aging, in what are we most interested?

"Do we focus upon the cycle of eating and drinking? Or if that is too crude for our taste, do we see life as a banquet and our aim to have our fill from the table? What about the business of this world - the making of money, the accumulation of property, the seeking of power? Is it at that level that we find the self we recognize as our own? The self is multi-levelled. If every level of activity we recognize and promote belongs to the perishable affairs of this world, which will cease at death, how do we expect to make sense of the resurrection? If we ignore and even block the higher circles of activity, how can the resurrection be an object of our hope? ... If there is nothing now in our lives that is of imperishable value, there is no point in a resurrection. The resurrection is a spiralling upward of those higher circles of activity, emergent already in this life, and due to find their fulfilment hereafter."

Doesn't all this give a new meaning to "aging"?

What can "AGING" mean for us?

It means: a process of growth. As Charles Davis says: "Aging is a process of growth, a gradual strengthening of those activities which are spiralling upwards into the new state of existence."

My wish to all the readers of Age Wise: May we all be aging very much in that positive way! growing into a new state of existence!

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From Pearl Drego - Age 43 - 225 Jor Bagh, New Delhi, 11000, India

News for Age Wise: In February the Daughters of St. Paul and Grail Women of Hope organized a one-day workshop on the Dignity and Vocation of Women for religious and lay women of Delhi. It was the first of its kind in the city and they asked me to conduct it. Over sixty women, sisters and lay, attended the Workshop.

I focussed on the main issues of the recent meditation of Pope John Paul II on Women, applying the main principles to our situation in India. There were lively discussions, personal sharings (one young sister told a beautiful piece on her struggle with praying to God as mother, another told that it was woman who was the crown of creation because she was created last, etc.), and re-enactment of Biblical scenes from a feminist perspective. As one woman remarked later, "We were all ready to take off, we just needed you to wave the green flag. Such a workshop was long overdue."

A young American woman walked into the room suddenly and warned against reading Mary Daly's book, *Gynaecology*, because she had left the Church. (I had recommended the book.) She also said that the meeting was being dominated by nuns and we should avoid the hostility of nuns that characterised the American Church Women's movement. But we soon overcame the cloud she cast and the workshop ended with a positive feeling of energy and the Holy Spirit. Two nuns acted for us the play "Annunciation" that I had written for the occasion.

Our new Centre [for TACET - Transactional Analytic Centre for Education, Research and Training] is a bit far from town, but the number of trainees and participants in our courses has not decreased. The annual TA Conference was a fine experience of "socialising" or "social justicising"! with TA concepts. I used "The Emerald Forest" as a starting point. We are slowly becoming conscious of the denudation of forests here in India and the ecological consequences to plant, animal and human life.

Another piece of news: Out of eight women who were invited to a private meeting with Cardinal Martini of Milano and Archbishop Almeida of Brazil, two of us were Grail members, Donna and myself. The meeting was called to inform the Cardinal about the position of women in the Church and Society. We had a very lively discussion and discussed that we Indian women were fairly united in our approach.

Also, Marie MarcelThackakara and her husband, who are working amongst tribals in the jungles of South India, inspired a march on behalf of landless tribals. Their activists trained under them were able to mobilise a 10,000 strong march which was well organised and peaceful. It has raised people's consciousness of the problems of the tribals who are bonded labour victims. The tribals themselves have grown in self-confidence and awareness of their rights through the experience. Marie herself did the news coverage while her husband did the photographs.

Copies of this article are available and of my play, "Annunciation" which appeared in the Catholic Examiner. [Ask Pearl.]



From Frances van der Schot - Age 76 - Begijnhof 20A, 1012 WT Amsterdam, The Netherlands

To all dear aging but young-of-heart friends in the Grail!

In the February issue of Age Wise I read the name "Vera Murphy". That name is still familiar to me after 50 years, but would we recognize each other if we were to meet again, Vera? And Marie Carey, another contributor, was always in the centre of Grail activities in Sydney ... she has a face I would still know because we met not too long ago ... with many in Australia that I love.

When young and full of deeds of daring-do, we thought we were really DOING something, weren't we. Now, with more serenity - as Vera says - I often realise the muddy mixture of intentions I used to have. But old age is no time for getting depressed: I feel more and more, even without achievements, to be a tiny living person within a vast, stirring and moving universe, myself too small to be important, yet important because alive.

I've always had deep joy and satisfaction from being part of something bigger than myself, of belonging to a huge, stirring crowd that moves together for an ideal.

The first of such experiences was when I was a child and we had a children's Mass for the Eucharistic Congress in Amsterdam. I still feel the child-like emotion of coming down all those steps in the big stadium to receive Communion on the football field ... rows and rows of folded hands.

My call to the Grail, I think, came when I had to give witness, loud-voiced, with 10,000 other Grail members in that same Amsterdam Stadium, to our Grail ideals: changing the world with the help of the Great Mover, the Holy Spirit. Every year on the second day of Pentecost, we think of it again.

Twice I was one of the 400,000 demonstrators for peace, in the Hague and in Amsterdam. We moved through the streets to a large square: men, women, children, babies, the handicapped in wheel chairs. It was one big, joyful mass of peacefulness.

Last Saturday [May 6] I had, for the fifth time, the experience of being part of that huge crowd called "The 8th May Movement". Some 100 organisations--among them Grail members--belong to this Catholic movement for renewal in the Church. Nearly 13,000 people this time gathered in the "Brabant Hallen", enormous halls for exhibitions and sales in Den Bosch for the annual manifestation. Apart from Dutch people, delegations had also come from Germany (with five Grail members!), Belgium and France; also one bishop from Pakistan ("I've met the living Church of the Netherlands here!"); one from Indonesia; one bishop of the Old Catholic Church who said, "I am a chosen bishop!" and many priests and nuns who looked like everyone else.

This year the theme was "Women and Men, Image of God". Dorothee Sölle should have been one of the main speakers on this subject but she was too ill to come and her place was taken by another woman theologian from East Germany.

"We cannot see God's face; we only know him from the way he acts."

"Where people do injustice, they tear up God's image."

"Where men exclude women, they cut the face of God in half and make it look ridiculous."

Many great things were said and done in the big central hall, in smaller buildings and along the outside booths. The "Declaration of Cologne" was discussed openly with a panel of theologians; the Conciliary Process for peace, justice and the wholeness of creation was a theme that came up in many sessions and, of course, "Women in Church Ministry".

The Grail, like all other participating organisations, was given an hour's time in a separate hall to explain itself. To an interested mixed audience, a group of members told about three works of the present Grail in Holland: 1) action against international traffic in women, brought to this country from third world countries under false pretentions, to become prostitutes. We try to get them freed and, if possible, back to Grail groups in their places of origin.

The second area is the cooperation with third world countries by an exchange of persons and other contacts. The group acted a meeting of Ugandan members, which portrayed their difficulties, work and spirit. And then we have the Tiltenberg, a project where women come for meditation (also Zen), women's programmes and community work.

More than anything else I loved the final prayer service with 13,000 people singing the songs most enjoyed by this kind of gathering. The volume and the spirit were tremendous! People's lives, it was said, are marked by desert experiences: hunger, thirst, being lost, powerless, alone. But also: discovering springs, making choices, meeting fellow-travellers, keeping hope alive. We gave our name and greeted everyone around us; we shared food and drink; children went round with bottles and bottles of water; everyone gave each other whatever they had brought. I got a fig, a piece of matzo, cake, orange juice, bread. My apple - in the desert both food and drink, I thought! - was shared with eight neighbours.

Like last year, the summing-up song was "The Desert Shall Bloom" (Huub Oosterhuis). It never fails to stir a crowd to a height of enthusiasm (but it also moves me when I read it alone at home). My translation can't convey that fire; read also Isaiah 35: 1-7:

The desert shall bloom.

The rocks that stood from the days of creation
open up and are full of water.

The thirsty will come and drink.

The desert shall drink.

The desert shall laugh and shout!



Please send letters, articles, "prayers, meditations, hymns, songs, texts dealing with eternal life in the New Testament" [Anne Matthews' suggestion] to:

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