

# ***A Fire of Love: A Reflection on Joining the Contemplative Evolution Network.***

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Late last summer, and around the same time I joined the *Contemplative Evolution Network*, I began a seven day 'at-home' retreat, *Heaven in Faith* with Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth had written the retreat for her beloved sister Guite in August 1906, just a few months before Elizabeth's death. A musician at heart and a classical pianist in life, Elizabeth composes union with God as the main theme of the retreat, a theme arranged with one, unwavering purpose: to pass beyond all limits... "to become so one with Him that we may say: I live no longer I, but He lives in me".<sup>1</sup>

In northern NSW where I live, the summer days were still long, hot and humid. I would wake and pray early, meet for spiritual direction in the morning and then brace myself for the heat of the day. While the days outside were hot, it was clear a fire had been ignited within, and that each prayer prayed, each memory and each experience rising was becoming kindling for this fire. A few days into the retreat I discovered that this was Elizabeth's intention!

Our God is a consuming fire that is "a fire of love" which destroys, which "transforms into itself everything it touches".<sup>2</sup>



Elizabeth's image of God as an all-consuming fire is just one of many images she uses in this symphony of contemplation, all enlisted to pursue her most passionate plea: to depart from oneself, lose sight of oneself, surrender oneself passionately, sink deeper and deeper into "Him", remain in "Him", penetrate further into the Abyss which is God. Her love for God is urgent as is her sense of God's love. A lover she tells us "has an immense hunger which wants to devour us absolutely".<sup>3</sup> And she makes no effort to hide her anticipation of a fiery rising from the depths of consciousness, or its impact on the soul when touched by the Source, simply inviting all to yield to the action of its flames:

Mystical death becomes very sweet and simple to those who yield themselves up to the action of its flames in the depths of their being.<sup>4</sup>

My journal reveals a little of this yielding beginning to take place:

*Love, you hear my constant yearning and then you engulf me, burning all this dispersed energy of pain and sadness... then...you awaken my desire to be consumed some more by you. You in me, becoming your own bread..... Beloved, is your intention to Love, or is it to transform everything into Love?*

It was here, at the fiery limits of my longing, I began to notice something happening between the retreat and the contemplative silence I entered into between 4.00pm and 5.00pm each day: a sense that the stillness and silence of the communal hour was galvanising the action of the retreat, staunching my heart, soothing painful arisings - both personally and in the world - and expanding joy from the prayers of the day. Kerrie Hide describes this beautiful

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Complete Works, Volume 1: General Introduction and Major Spiritual Writings*, Translated by Aletheia Kane, ocd, (ICS Publications, 2014), First Retreat: Heaven in Faith, para 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, para 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, para 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Obbard, ocd, *The Music Of Silence: Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity for Everyone*, New City: 2016, 45.

dynamic between the stilling of the heart and the prayers flowing in and out through the communion consciousness towards those suffering and hurting:

Our role at present is to go within and stabilise in our heart, in the one Heart, and intentionally flow in harmony with enstatic-ecstatic Agape. This does not mean that those who do not see and respond, or who feel lost, abandoned or afraid are left behind – on the contrary. The conscious pouring out of Agape of one person strengthens the whole.<sup>5</sup>

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Within a few days of entering this heart space, I became aware of an exquisite, deeper intimacy and expanding connection to the network itself, a 'union in communion' an experience I sought to describe:

*A doorway has been opened and has led me to the pearl of great price...[this community] is not a pearl I could ever have imagined...it is radiant, vibrant, expanding, consuming, unifying, drawing us all into itself...*

For Beatrice Bruteau, awakening into communion consciousness in this way is always a unifying, ever-radiant process and she encourages us to find ways to describe it:

The identity that had been established by energy currents that turned back towards the center when they had come to the edge of their world has lost its foundation and been replaced by an identity that never turns back towards itself but consists of an ever radiant process. One radiant process enters into and unites with another radiant process. "Together" they "beam into" a third and join it. These are only rough metaphors...not to be taken too literally....[so much as ] indications of interior acts to be made so that one can recover the *experience* that is being described.<sup>7</sup>

As I write, summer has turned to autumn, autumn to winter, and I have settled into awareness of being together each day in an identity that 'never turns back towards itself', but tenderly moves and dissolves me into stillness and silence. For Beatrice, this is how it is, for "community and personhood go together".<sup>8</sup> Simply being in the sacred heart space together, One Body, has become the source of such deep contentment and joy. I sense Love healing and effortlessly strengthening and stabilising from within the Whole, even the overwhelming pain and injustice in our world, grounding and one-ing all in Love. Teilhard describes something similar:

Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves.<sup>9</sup>



Having learned how intimately my retreat with Elizabeth was entwined through the contemplative silence of each day, I conclude by returning to her timeless wisdom which I feel weaves through our communal heart, calling us gently and completely to delight in deeper intimacy in God, our all-consuming Fire of Love:

O consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, "come upon me," and create in my soul a kind of incarnation of the Word: that I may be another humanity for Him in which He can renew His whole Mystery. And You, O Father, bend lovingly over Your poor little creature; "cover her with Your shadow," seeing in her only the "Beloved in whom You are well pleased."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kerrie Hide, "The Ecstasy of Agape" in *Personal Transformation and a New Creation: The Spiritual Revolution of Beatrice Bruteau*, (Orbis, 2017), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Kerrie Hide, "The Ecstasy of Agape" in *Personal Transformation and a New Creation: The Spiritual Revolution of Beatrice Bruteau*, (Orbis, 2017), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, *Radical Optimism: Practical Spirituality in an Uncertain World*, (Sentient Publications, 1993), 108.

<sup>9</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, (Kindle Version) Location 4383

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Complete Works*, "O My God Trinity Whom I Adore", 183. (Quotation marks are used by Elizabeth to indicate she is borrowing an expression)