

Emergence!

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A new year begins! A fresh start! The phoenix rises from the ashes of the past year just ended! What a year it proved to be! As we open into this New Year, perhaps it is the ancient myth of the phoenix that can speak to where we are right now. *In Ancient Greek folklore, a **phoenix** is a long-lived bird that cyclically regenerates or is otherwise born again. Associated with the sun, a phoenix obtains new life by arising from the ashes of its predecessor.*ⁱ Are we now about to witness a new arising of the phoenix as we begin to look to even the possibility of a post-COVID world? What emergence are we glimpsing as we gaze into the ashes of our 'predecessor' 2020 world?

Glancing over the CEN reflections written for the start of each month of last year, I re-lived the journey of the year. It was a year filled with emotions of every kind - pain, struggle and longing, disappointment, fear, frustration, love and compassion. The different writers' insights invited us to reflect more deeply on what might be happening **beneath** the outer challenges we were facing each month. I see this now as seeking the rising phoenix in the ashes of devastating events. Happenings such bushfires, the COVID 19 pandemic, acts of terror, the continuing devastation of the planet, the pain of first peoples everywhere. Through all of these crisis-based reflections ran a call to compassion and a focus on a new consciousness slowly forming in the midst of it all. This consciousness was variously titled as: "a sense of the whole", "one-ness", "the energy force of Love", "universal Christ consciousness", "communion-consciousness", "one-ing in Omega Love". Our December reflection led us into the imagined movements within Mary at the time of the annunciation and offering this as a parable for our own growing consciousness of the larger Birth of unfolding into the cosmic Christ.

These reflections themselves draw us into a search for what might be gently forming beneath outer events. What transformation has been occurring as the phoenix ashes of last year slowly reconstitute? What has been incubated within us and our world, and in the cosmos itself over the

long months just passed? I am reminded of a verse from a poem I have loved for a long time - its chance timing here is noteworthy as we move towards the feast of the Epiphany:



Epiphany Songⁱⁱ

*If you watch as you have not watched before,
you will see the morning begin to lace the darkness.
If you turn from the trail that has drawn you for ages
and gaze at the fringes, you will see the timber budding.
If you lean beyond the place of your balance, your arms lifted,
a rhythm will catch and lift you...*

Peter Steele SJ

If we did “watch as we have not watched before”, what might we see emerging from the ashes of last year?

A clue to this can be found in the beautifully moving Australian Christmas carol entitled “*Christmas with You*”ⁱⁱⁱ which was created especially for the end of a year remembered as the COVID year. Sung by a choir of over a thousand voices singing from their homes and pieced together into a united symphony of song, this carol was a powerful reminder of what we might SEE emerging. The words of the song are simple and, in their simplicity, express the human heart's longing to “come home”.



On screen, some were tearful as they sang, “*Can you find your way home Christmas night? There is a star to guide you. Can you find your way home Christmas day? We’ve been apart for so long now...*” Many watching were tearful also. Why? Over these past twelve months, we have come to know in a whole new way the need for having loved ones

near, to be able to hold them close and to speak with in person. We have felt the separation of distance, even as technology brought us closer. Perhaps we can glimpse here, the “star” that has been guiding us through the pain and struggle, to bring us HOME – home to one another, home to ourselves, home to the environment which, in our time of withdrawal, was also able to breathe a little more freely and recoup some of its lost energies and habitats.

We have been forced to lean beyond the place of our imagined "balance" and discover that we were not balanced at all. Our "normal" was anything but normal. In our short-sightedness, we actually had been doing untold harm to ourselves, to others - especially to those in poorer countries – and to our planet.



One of the many things that emerged in the year just ended was the need to 'come home'. We were forced to physically stay at home, during long lockdown weeks and months. We had to work from home, be schooled from home, connect with others from home, hold meetings from home – to sing, play music, run conferences, retreats, seminars, webinars and much else, from home and in ways we had never dreamed possible. Being "grounded" at home provided a context that enabled us to sink into the deeper ground of our being if we chose to go there. It took many down to the bedrock we needed to find. It forced us to return to the very place where our deepest longing and belonging dwells. Many of us came home to our heart centre, where Love abounds and where loved ones are always held in bonds of belonging no matter where they are.



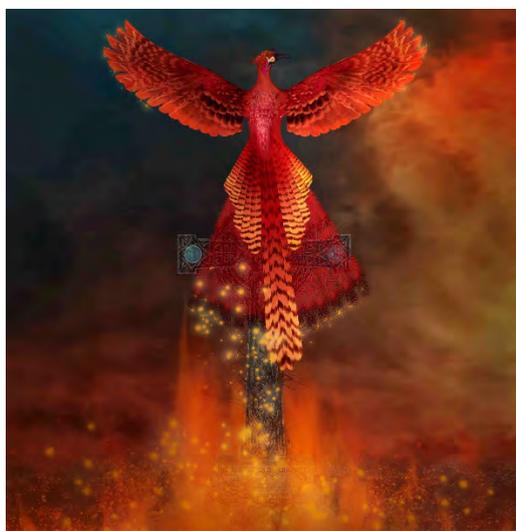
Another 'emergence' in the COVID year has been opening to 'others'- conversations with strangers often began easily as often occurs in crisis times. Many of us were "deepened down" into greater mindfulness and contemplation because of having time to BE. We were forced time and again into awareness of our vulnerability, our smallness, and at times our pettiness and blurred vision as a multitude of large scale devastating events rocked the world. Yes, 2020 held all the elements needed to force us off the "balance" we thought we had and led many to turn to a force beyond themselves for "salvation", healing and help.

Yet, if we look very closely and peer deep inside the dark mass of catastrophic events of the past year, can we not "see the timber budding"? Small shoots of new life and possibility are springing up everywhere. Can we "*find our way back home...*" by focusing on these shoots so that they may grow? As CEN members, committed to contemplation and compassion for our hurting world, can we attest to the miracle of the birth taking place? The phoenix IS rising! Can we witness to the deepening that has taken place in our own hearts and enabled hope to flourish? Can we choose to SEE the enlargement of human capacities to hold MORE life, more pain, compassion, and love? Can we affirm

the growth of a resilience of spirit generated by suffering endured and survived? Can we find hope in the generosity of heart of healthcare workers, as well as in the daily random acts of kindness of so many others around us? Can we glimpse emerging within ourselves and in others, the gratitude of soul for things previously taken for granted? Can we marvel at the creativity we saw as gifted people developed ways of knitting separate renditions of music, song and prayer into a united whole which exuded greater beauty and meaning than before? This is but a small part of the story unfolding from the ashes of last year.

At the deep centre, we can perhaps glimpse an awakening taking place - the world heart is stirring. Assured that "what we focus upon grows", perhaps the focus for CEN this year can be on this heart awakening. We can choose to see everything from the perspective of the larger whole that has been forged through the trials we have endured together. We can choose to see difference as a gift, affirming it as having a place in the emerging whole - even as the voices of separate singers were woven into one symphony of song. Thus we too can knit and weave from our separate lives, stances, beliefs and customs, a more conscious way of being human. Maybe the world heart that is awakening is the heart of the rising phoenix. It is strong, contemplative and compassionate, beating as a heart that sings one-ness into being. As Beatrice Bruteau attests:

"At some deep level, we know that we are not mutually alienated from each other and we do have sufficient being. In talking with one another, in sharing experiences ...we are helping each other know that we are deeply related, that we are precious and deserving, that the universe is our home, that we can feel safe on the deepest level of our being..."^{iv}



The Phoenix IS rising...dare we choose to be part of it?

ⁱ Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix_(mythology))

ⁱⁱ Peter Steele sj, "Epiphany Song", 1973-74. "Songs of Prayer"

ⁱⁱⁱ See https://www.abc.net.au/classic/read-and-watch/news/virtual-classic-choir-premieres-new-australian-christmas-carol/12982952?sfmc_id=106895757&utm_id=1506717&utm_source=sfmc%e2%80%8b%e2%80%8b&utm_medium=email%e2%80%8b%e2%80%8b&utm_campaign=abc_radio_classic_sfmc_20201215%e2%80%8b%e2%80%8b&utm_term=%e2%80%8b

^{iv} Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, New World Library, Novato California 1999, p. xviii - xix