

Largesse Is Journey's End



Irene Dugan, r.c., with Avis Clendenen

Introduction

SISTER IRENE DUGAN, R.C., COMPLETED THE FIRST SUBSTANTIAL draft of a manuscript entitled “Love Is All Around: In Disguise” only six weeks prior to her death in July 1997. A few weeks before her death, Irene and I had what would be our last conversation. She directed me to pick up a box that she left for me at the front desk at the Fullerton Cenacle. She did not mention that the box contained two copies of her manuscript, the computer disks, and all the notes related to her book. She was more interested in summing up our years of knowing one another and “directing” me in what she wanted for her funeral. She seemed in relatively good spirits and at one point was gazing quietly out her bedroom window with her back to me. As she was pondering she said to me, “Write this down. Are you listening? I know what I want on my memorial card.” I said, “Go ahead, I’m ready.” Irene proceeded, “I want my card to read, Wafted into Life, December 4, 1909....” Before she could go any further, I blurted out, “Wafted?” Swinging her wheelchair around to face me, looking simultaneously annoyed and amused, she spelled, “W A F T E D. Look it up.”

I did look it up. According to the dictionary, *wafted* means “to be carried lightly and smoothly into the air or over water, to float or be carried in a current or even a gust.” The word has the same root as another word meaning “an escort vessel,” and it is, as well, related to the word meaning “a watchman or watchwoman.” Irene Dugan was indeed wafted in life, savoring life as a gift over time, trial, and triumph. She floated back and forth and in and out of the lives of those who sought her counsel, at times a gentle breeze, at other times gusting boldly, but

always the watchful escort vessel guiding others on their journey to freedom, wholeness, and deeper realms of love.

The cardboard box waiting for me at the Cenacle was a treasure chest filled with the written words of Sister Irene Dugan, r.c. This essay is of Irene's making, and I am simply the scribe wafting her words onto these pages.

"Love Is All Around: In Disguise" opens with this greeting from Irene: "I write these pages not for the learned or academic but for the seekers, flounders, stargazers, and lovers, such as myself." She goes on to say:

My friends, folks in class, and others have been after me for years to write a book. They keep saying, "Irene, you can't die unless you leave something for us." I couldn't understand what they were talking about and figured if I was giving them anything, surely it was the giving of myself every single day. In spite of this objection, the words kept coming, "Write a book! Write a book!" About ten years ago, I started to write about Ignatius of Loyola and Ira Progoff, two men who are very important to me. Ignatius was a sixteenth-century Spaniard whose spiritual conversion resulted in the founding of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and the creation of the inner journey known as the Spiritual Exercises.¹ Ira Progoff, a contemporary colleague and friend, is a depth psychologist and originator of the *Intensive Journal*, *At a Journal Workshop*, and *Process Meditation*[™]. While five centuries apart, Ignatius could have been a twentieth-century psychologist and Ira a sixteenth-century visionary. My original hope had been to attempt to integrate their ideas and teachings, going deeper and discovering more meaning. My first attempt failed for various reasons.

I trust this effort, however, will reach completion. My book is an exercise in the disciplines of psychology and spirituality, an invitation to a journey toward self-knowledge. The tools of depth psychology and Christian spirituality can help anyone who wishes to enter the process of striving towards wholeness and holiness. The process is rigorous, freeing, and rewarding, all in one. It is an awesome process full of ups and downs, light and shadow, the known and unknowns, safety and risks. The objective is to free us gradually to be unafraid to look at the

experiences of our life, our inner and outer environments, and decide to walk the path of enlightenment and transformation.

With these words Irene Dugan began her *tour de force*. The following is a lengthy excerpt from chapter 6 of “Love Is All Around: In Disguise,” where Irene explores her vision of spiritual transformation.²

Love, the Transformer

Ignatius calls the bookend of the Spiritual Exercise “*Contemplation Ad Amorem*,” translated “Contemplation to Obtain Love.” In Spanish, the native language of Ignatius, it is *Contemplacion para alcanzar Amor*, meaning, “To anticipate the dawning of Love.” From my vantage point, love is the mystery of care, of life, of production, and continuity of life passed from one human to another through the dynamic life of the Holy Trinity.

Love is a gathering together within the temple of our being all our energy and dynamism to apprehend love. Love is the most needed, least understood and heeded of human necessities. Love is an unparalleled gift that is too often avoided, even discarded.

We speak of a “labor of love” or of “love’s labor lost” with stress on the word *love*, and pass over the prime word *labor*. Labor has the flavor of creating, preserving, and developing something, something we have inherently, and so is an incessant knocking for our attention and response. God does this to perfection, laboring over their handiwork.³ We are invited and required to enter into their labor in order to shape ourselves under their tutelage, to their image. Through this mutuality, we take on the world, the cosmos, and love it to maturity.

And so we arrive at a deep attentive consciousness that knows “in my end is my beginning, and in my beginning is my end.” Such unity is endlessly desired and so seldom entered into because it is under our noses, and our noses have lost their sense of smell due to inner and outer smog. We need to come into our senses sharply and brightly so that we see freshly, hear acutely, touch tenderly, taste with relish, and take time metaphorically and literally to “smell the flowers.”

*[God] has showed you, O [humans] what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you*

*but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

(Micah 6:8)

We are made sensuous beings, and reclaiming this gift is an art to be cultivated or we shall not be grasped by love. Love is a pure, sensuous gift assuring me,

I never was alone. I never am alone. I never will be alone, even if I disown the Presence. The automatic drive in me moves to constant self-awareness, self-alertness, self-development, and self-arrival. This faces me head-on to the Other, out of whom I spring, am shaped and formed, and a transforming union is experienced. This is my end and my beginning. (Buber 1996, p. 3)

In this day and age, my beingness and ability to come to Other springs from my daily experience of traveling through layers of accumulated artifacts of the self, to the cleansing waters and mirroring love of the Begetting Being.

Interaction of Lover and Beloved

Mutuality mediates transformation. Yet transformation, as a process of growth, relies most often on the ordinary formative developments of our lives. Formation begins in the womb of our mother, continues under family influence through infancy and early preschool years (though now, in the almost twenty-first century, due to the pressures of both parents working and the consequent explosion of child-care options, such family-based formation is not a given). The next stage, school or its equivalent, makes a strong imprint on children. The experience of schooling has a definitive and defining impact on formation. This is followed in great intensity by entry into the demands of professional life and the many choices of avocations. We can be drugged by the lure of billboards, super sales techniques, and an unexamined grasping nature. We are shaped, reshaped, and misshaped through the unique features of our developmental process. At long last, if we are alive and alert, we begin to listen to our own life suggesting that it is time for us to take our formation into our own hands. This inaugu-

rates a major transitional phase urging us to consider profound decision-making about how we are going to live *now*.

Consciously examining the imprint of external authority on our lives, we gradually begin to take back the power over ourselves that we had given away and never acknowledged. The dumping/blaming syndrome comes to a grinding halt as I am confronted with the self, saying, "Now I begin . . . Begin? Begin what?" Re-formation! It is my turn to form, shape, and mold the product that is uniquely me according to the inner work at hand. A first question might be, "What is at hand?" Then follows the inventory of what it is at hand, meaning the native resources within myself, out of which I gradually create the SELF waiting to be born. Previously unobserved doors, windows, caverns, and heights emerge before me. Looking at them makes me shudder until I slowly quiet down and let my inner voice speak, listening to love's lure and its direction. My life's journey shifts and the process of mature transformation is summoned into reality.

All creation has been awaiting this swell of the movement of love towards Love. Transformation, as an endemic force in the press toward wholeness, while painful, demands an active give-over to love. The childish and adolescent exertions of egomania, fixations on what others think, and solely seeking external approvals loses its power and is replaced by an inner drive digging deeper into the essence of who I am and who I desire to be. The Psalmist sings, "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me ears that *dig after you*" (Psalm 40:6 Revised Standard Version). Reliance on the virtues of trust and fidelity create the inner condition that enables the journey to deeper regions of my being and taps the essential fundamentals of transformation. I become immune to the sirens of possession, hoarding, and, above all, success and its allurements. Wavering at this juncture of human becoming can spell disaster, serious wavering, that is, which carries the flavor of fearing the truth of spiritual adulthood.

The terrain is rugged, the riverbed not quite even, and so we fight and flow with the currents. Doubts that we are on the right way fly hither and thither in an attempt to erode trust and fidelity. Our beliefs are redefined from the inner out. The dross is burned away and the gold of love – the embrace of the sacrality and mutuality of our lives – begins to shine through. The moments when we are conscious of

changing or having been changed are mighty moments. It is as if we see Love as a pillar of cloud by day and one of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22 RSV). The trust was worth the trusting; the faithfulness to the way, a journey to the promised land. The state of transformation is rich with spiritual paradox: we live in an atmosphere of quietude and calm and, at the same time, of extraordinary activity surrounding the *kairos* of our becoming a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17 RSV).

My will has now become supple and attentive to the voice of the Beloved, from whom I now hear the Voice within. At this level of intentional living and holy relationship, flexibility and fluidity of movement are reinforced. I am in union and harmony with Love. My whole being is infused with this awareness, and my desire is never to be separated from its passion.

THOU SHALT KNOW [GOD] WHEN [GOD] COMES

Not by any din of drums—

Not by the vantage of [any] airs—

Not by anything [God] wears—

Nor [any] gown—

FOR [GOD'S] PRESENCE KNOWN SHALL BE

By the Holy Harmony

That [God's] coming makes in thee—

(unknown fifteenth-century writer)

Nestled in Holy Harmony is a mysteriously dynamic relationship. Transformation is mediated by this mutuality and has its entitlements and obligations, as any truly authentic and significant relationship. Life with the Beloved is strenuous because it involves the living out of the receiving and the giving of love. Attentive alertness to the Presence is imperative. Alert listening and hearing – activation of these inner senses – become second nature as the transforming process bears fruit. I live in tandem with creation and creativity, the music of the spheres envelops me as I become a living God to the world, the universe, the cosmos. A craving for simplicity in living and its consequent freedom reigns. Clinging to the old self falls away. I experience a sense of my inner environment as uncluttered and ordered. Love flows

through me and neutralizes all disintegrative and destructive evil forces. Paul in his letter to the Galatians put it this way, "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20 New Jerusalem Bible). This is a season of alertness and inner brightness. Energy is neither blocked nor wasted. True life flows and is shared as love requires, and the lifeline is thus kept open for the free exchange of giving and receiving love. The process is simultaneously elevating and devastating.

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov said: "How to love [people] is something I learned from a peasant who was sitting in an inn with other peasants, drinking. For a long time he was as silent as all the rest, but when he was moved by the wine, he asked one of the men seated beside him: 'Tell me, do you love me or don't you love me?' The other replied: 'I love you very much.' But the first peasant replied: 'You say that you love me, but do you know what I need? If you really loved me you would know.' The other had not a word to say to this, and the peasant who had put the question fell silent again. But I understood. To know the needs of men and women and to bear the burden of their sorrow – this is true love." (Buber 1996, p. 2)

Largesse Is Journey's End

Love opens our eyes, hearts, and hands in wide embrace of the all of life. An aura of eternity marks the season where largesse is Journey's End. The temporal has found its place and is the bridge to the other shore, also known as heaven. Heaven is an idea we tend to leave alone, bypass, or sigh over. We seem to fear swirling it around in a brandy snifter for taste, lest it evaporate, leaving us with nothing but the vapors. Yet, heaven does not ask us to address it, familiarize ourselves with it, so that we end up yearning for it with great intensity. For that to occur, we must devote time for savoring its mystery.

What do you feel, what do you think heaven to be like? St. Paul had this to say: "Of this wisdom it is written: Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on [humans] what God has prepared for those who love [God]" (1 Cor. 2:9 New American Bible). When we are fully alive, alert, and aware here on earth, we are full of energy to explore, discover, and dig out every possible area of learning

and experiencing the knowledge and wisdom at our fingertips. The excitement of increased knowledge and understanding through experience impels us into further searching, even when extra energy and push are necessary.

Heaven is going to be all this excitement, plus more, without the darkness and the disappointment that is inherent during our earthly pilgrimage. Boredom apparently is not a trait in God's being. Ergo, boredom ceases to exist in the largesse that is Journey's End. We will never live long enough to be satiated with respect to all the beauties and burdens of life. Music, science, literature, all areas of art, including culinary arts, are endless vistas open to our searching and inquisitive nature, to be pursued with pleasure, ease, and excitement. The challenges, enormous sorrows, and profound sufferings are but guises for growth. The God who stands by our side in times of struggle – always knowing our need and bearing our burden – is the same God who beckons us to the Divine household at journey's end where we reside forever in our natural dwelling place.

The gateway to this bliss is death, which turns out to be a friend rather than a foe. Death is the doorway of final transformation into unending life, light, and love. Death, then, as well as love, is the Transformer. Henri Nouwen writes,

Dying is the most general human event, something we all have to do. But do we do it well? Is our death more than an unavoidable fate that we simply wish would not be? Can it somehow become an act of fulfillment, perhaps more human than any other act?

. . . When we contemplate with compassion the suffering and pain both around the world and close to home, we receive a gift: a reminder of the "great human sameness" of "all of us [who] will die and participate in the same end." When we offer companionship to the dying we remember and celebrate the lives of the departed, we create a reciprocal "community of care" and "remind each other that we will bear fruit beyond the few years we have to live." . . . When we face death with hope we make the choice of faith, a choice based on the conviction that we see not only failure on the cross of Jesus, but victory as well, not only destruction, but new life as well, not only nakedness but glory as well. (Nouwen 1994, p. XIV)

There is no satiety in heaven, only largesse. We experience the wholeness of creation and our own as well, for all will be ours forever in freedom. Yet this experience is devoid of acquisitiveness to possess, dominate, or manipulate. All is healed, the human and divine mingle and become one. In this dimension of new being there is no need to believe because we shall have vision. We shall see God face-to-face and bask in knowledge of the true Paternity/Maternity. Hope will be absorbed in the final embrace of the God of our yearning. What will remain is love – love as we never imagined could be experienced as real. The totality of living is ours in sheer wonder and joy. Why, then, are we so shy about contemplating this reality?

Each of us will be transformed. Each of us will be a new creation and yet remain our true self without impediments. We will go to the depth of the sea and explore its treasures without scuba diving equipment. We will fly to Uranus without space ships. We will plumb the deep recesses of humanness, and our largesse to embrace the discovery will be limitless. We will roam with dinosaurs, understand and converse in all languages and no language. We will sing arias and folk songs in praise of God. We will experience what it actually means to be an heir of God. The divine will shine in and through us, and it will be only the beginning. We shall be complete human beings in a continuing movement of union.

When I dream of heaven, I experience a feeling of excitement that what I am doing now is made more worthwhile by the vision of what is to come. Therefore, it is the now that intimates what will be. Therefore, I want to be related to and involved in the now of my existence and not consumed by fear or searching for baubles and commodities that erode and fade. I am the custodian of my soul, whose life is guided by the Master Crafter.

I am universal, in that all that ever was exists in me. I am a song of the Universe with all the chords of creation played out in me. Such is the optimism of one who lives an examined life. Love is all around in the disguise of now.

Conclusion: Dying in Character

Thus Irene ends her extended reflection on the art form of spiritual transformation, the largesse of eternity, and the possibility and prom-

ise of living the now. Wafted into life in 1909, she gusted about for eighty-seven abundantly rich years on this side of eternity. For many of us, she was an escort vessel, gently yet “persuasively” guiding our journey, always a watchwoman of some larger vision. The full measure of her contribution to transformational spirituality lies hidden in the hearts of the thousands of persons she companioned along the marvelously treacherous pilgrimage we call life.

Literally hours before her death on July 21, 1997, Irene’s nurse was prepared to give her an injection for pain. It was reported to me that Irene gestured for the nurse to stop. She knew that the medication would make her less conscious, less viscerally aware. True to character, she indicated her desire not to be sedated away from the now of her dying by simply saying, “No, please, I want to have the experience.” And so she did. And so she is experiencing the largesse at journey’s end that some day will be our now.

Notes

1. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola – detailed practices for spiritual deepening – is a classic of Christian spirituality. Composed by Ignatius between 1533 and 1541, the work contains instructions, admonitions, annotations, examinations, warnings, prayers, meditations, and other exercises aimed at leading one to virtue, discernment of spirits, renewal in faith, and transformation through love; a detailed “four-week process” for conversion.
2. Avis Clendenen is completing Sister Irene Dugan’s book under the title “Love Is All Around in Disguise: Meditations for Spiritual Seekers.”
3. Sister Dugan understood God’s dynamic nature as essentially Trinitarian. She often made reference to Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let *us* make humankind in *our* own image, after *our* likeness . . .’” Plurality in God is critical to fully understanding the theological framework that informed Sister Dugan’s life work in spiritual direction. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, always mysteriously confounding, might be best expressed as one God with three ways of being: (1) as Unconditional Love, *agape*; (2) incarnate and Incarnational, Word-made-flesh; and (3) Life Source within the depth of each human spirit, Ground of faith and hope gifting each for others, Animator of community. In sum, we experience God as one, yet as having three distinguishable ways of being.

References

Buber, M. 1996. *Ministry of Money*. Newsletter, no. 103 (August).

Nouwen, H. 1994. *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. New York: Harper Collins.