



# NOVA notes

NOVA Catholic Community

September 2011

## Chair Notes...

**H**eatwave. Earthquake. Hurricane. What's next? Well, considering the power and mysteries of Mother Nature, it's hard to predict, although weather forecasters do amazingly well. But there's no getting around the fact that we live in a world of change. In our physical, social and spiritual environment, change happens, like it or not. So individuals and societies must figure out how to cope with it, adjust or resist it, weaken or thrive.

We in NOVA are also asking ourselves how to respond to change, how we can be guided and strengthened by it. Or not. Those who participated in the American Catholic Council (ACC) gathering in Detroit this summer want to share what they experienced and talk about its challenges for all of us. Circle October 2 and 23 on your calendar to see videos of exciting speakers and participate in the discussions.

At the recent General Meeting of the community, we discussed the implications of the newly "revised" lectionary approved by the bishops. This so-called "new" translation is a reversion to pre-Vatican II, non-inclusive language, a change that goes backward. Participants in the meeting agreed this is a change that NOVA will resist. We can provide alternative lectionaries for our presiders without surrendering our commitment to use inclusive, appropriate language in our prayers and songs. Without compromising our identity as a post Vatican II community.

Decision-making often points toward change, and just a year ago, NOVA decided on the new idea of selecting a major peace and social justice proposal each spring and to raise the money to achieve it. In May, NOVA chose to support education in South Sudan as our new project, and we are now in the midst of lively discussions about fundraising. And just two years ago, the community endorsed a new approach to the calling forth process to select co-chairs.

NOVA strives to involve the whole community in decisions, to value consensus and avoid hierarchy and rancor, to be efficient while trying to listen to each other, to select a person and a project while trying to make everyone feel supported and valued.

But something isn't working. Thirty-five individuals responded to the recent survey about our consensus and calling forth process, and their comments are both thoughtful and provocative. Of course, everyone is pleased to support and endorse the individuals who agree to serve as co-chairs, and everyone agrees that the new Peace and Social Justice project is important, but many people feel that they were not able to participate in either process in a meaningful way. Many feel we need to review how to do consensus.

Reflecting on these comments, I began to wonder if *consensus* and *efficiency* are incompatible concepts. According to experts on group decision-making, consensus usually doesn't work when a topic is complex and time is limited. Is it possible that NOVA is asking too much of the consensus process at times? Should there be a way to allow for as much time as it takes for prayer and sharing and listening? Perhaps we need more than one evening to have a deliberative, thoughtful meeting and to reach a satisfying consensus. Members also expressed a need to feel more involved in the calling forth process. Several references were made to "calling forth others" (in addition to the co-chair) and to remember there are many ways we can minister to each other and participate more fully in NOVA. Reading the comments, one can't help but conclude we need some community "listening sessions" so that we can respond to these questions and concerns.

Whatever change we are in the midst of—earthquake, hurricane, decision-making, crisis or celebration—we strive to remember and hold onto who we are. Vatican II Catholics. Loving, believing, hopeful. Striving to listen well—to the Spirit and each other.

~Teddi Ahrens, Co-chair



## September Birthdays

NOVA Message Line (703) 852-7907

Chairpersons Teddi Ahrens  
Cece Michelotti

Treasurer Joe Formoso

Coordinator,  
Community Life Marlene Shade

Liturgy Coordinator Gloria Mog

Padre Cadre Coordinator John Mooney

Music Coordinator Victoria Robinson

Peace and Justice Coordinators Dianne Carroll  
Marie Keefe

Christ House  
Coordinator Kopp Michelotti

Facilities Glen Passin

Directory & Yahoo Groups  
Coordinator; Webmaster Ken Chaison

Newsletter Editor Judy Christofferson

8 Barbara Formoso  
Cathy Showalter  
9 Gloria Mog  
13 Adam Clarkson  
Hetty Irmer  
14 Christopher Iskander  
18 John Michie  
23 Bob Michie  
25 Nico Mele  
27 Daniel Cackley  
29 Ted Miller

*Please send Judy Christofferson your birthday if you would like it to appear here (month/day only).*

### NOVA is praying for. . .

**Peggy Becker**, who is healing from hip surgery.

**Eve Birch**, who is looking for a home and items to provide temporary housing for the homeless.

**Brigid Doherty**, Kate's sister, who is recovering from two broken ankles.

**Sonja Donahue**, who appreciates a card, a call or a visit.

**Jody Furlong**, who would also appreciate a phone call or note.

**Michael Iskander**, who is recovering from extensive injuries following a car accident.

Remember these and any other NOVA members and their friends and family who need our prayers.

**October Newsletter Deadline:  
Sunday, September 25**

The NOVA Catholic Community invites you to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy with us every Sunday in Arlington, Virginia.

**Note:** Our Liturgy is usually celebrated at Kenmore Middle School, Arlington Blvd. and Carlin Springs Road, Arlington, VA. Beginning Memorial Day weekend up to our Fall Retreat weekend in September, we celebrate at Lacey Woods Park, George Mason Drive near Washington Blvd., unless otherwise noted.

Liturgies at Kenmore begin at 10:15 a.m.

Liturgies at Lacey Woods begin at 9:30 a.m.  
Gather at 9:15 am

Call the Message Line (above) or check the NOVA website for the latest information.

## Liturgies: Cycle A

Inclusive Readings and Music Selections are available in the new NOVA Yahoo Group Files. Please give all music selections to the Music Liaison the Sunday before your liturgy and print 65 copies of the liturgy program. Liturgies at Kenmore begin at 10:15 a.m. and at 9:30 at Lacey Woods Park.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Instead of listing the readings for each Sunday, planners can find the readings for their liturgy at [www.groups.yahoo.com/group/novacommunity/files](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/novacommunity/files). Let Ken Chaison know if you have a problem with this.

### September Music Liaison Tim White

#### September 4 - 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Quinn Connors, O.Carm.

Planners: Victoria Robinson and Linda Rosenberg

#### September 11 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

John Haughey, SJ

Planner: Peggy Meyer

#### September 18 – 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

##### Shrine Mont Retreat

John Haughey, SJ

Planners: Retreat Team

#### September 25 – 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gerry Stockhausen, SJ

Planner: Catherine Loveless

**Reminder:** This Sunday, NOVA returns to Kenmore School. The liturgy begins at 10:15.

### October Music Liaison Gloria Mog

#### October 2 – 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dan Madigan, SJ

Planner: Catherine Loveless

#### October 9 – 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ray Kemp

Planner: Eric Carroll

#### October 16 – 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gerry Stockhausen, SJ

Planners: Mike and Gen Timpane

#### October 23 – 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jim Hug, SJ

Planners: Nancy and John Veldhuis

#### October 30 – 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joe Nangle, OFM

Planners: Peace and Social Justice Group

### Fall Liturgy Tip: Bringing Communion to the Sick

All community members are encouraged to consider themselves Eucharistic Ministers to the Sick. Each week, Planners place two boxes on the Offertory Table for transporting Communion to those who are unable to be with us due to illness. If you know you want to bring Communion to someone, please alert the Planners ahead of time so enough boxes are on the altar. Traveling Communion ministers are asked to come up for a blessing after Communion is distributed. Tell the priest who you will be visiting so they can be remembered in the blessing. If both Communion boxes aren't needed, it is up to the Planners to consume the extra bread and put the boxes away after liturgy. If more boxes are needed, one can be retrieved from storage.

It is helpful to bring the liturgy program of the day to the sick and share with them a little bit about the liturgy and anything that felt inspirational to you. If they are well enough and interested, you can read all of the Readings of the day or just the Gospel. If there is a candle available (and no oxygen nearby), light it and either create your own ritual for giving Communion or follow the one printed in the Directory on the NOVA website. Always emphasize that you are offering them the Body of Christ in communion with the Nova Community, allow for silence afterward, recite the Lord's Prayer at some point together and offer special blessings for their health and healing. When you are done with the ritual, blow out the candle to signify the end and remain to do some brief socializing if appropriate. Please remember to return the Communion boxes the following week.

## SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

### AFAC – Arlington Food Assistance Center Hunger Action Month September 2011



**Did you know that 15,000  
Arlington County residents  
are food insecure?**

**AFAC serves over 1,350  
families each week.**

**September is Hunger Action Month**  
Visit [www.AFAC.org](http://www.AFAC.org) to get involved in our community.

NOVA volunteers distribute food at Gunston Recreation Center in South Arlington as part of the AFAC food distribution each week in Arlington. (See September schedule below.)

**September is Hunger Awareness Month and NOVA will participate as fully as possible by:**

- **A food drive**— details about what kind of items are best will be communicated in the weekly announcements. We will continue the drive throughout the month.
- Arlington restaurants will donate a part of their proceeds to AFAC **on these Tuesdays in September:**

**September 6: Pie-Tanza (20% of proceeds to AFAC) 2503B N Harrison St. Arlington**

**September 13: Pete's Apizza (25% to AFAC) 3017 Clarendon Blvd. Arlington**

**September 20: Melting Pot (15% to AFAC) 1110 N. Glebe Rd. Arlington**

**September 27: The Front Page (15% to AFAC) 4201 Wilson Blvd. Arlington**

#### **September Gunston Schedule:**

Every Thursday there is a seasoned volunteer at Gunston Recreation Center; this is your chance serve others who are in need.. Having someone who speaks Spanish is a real plus (but not a requirement) for each of the teams. If you are interested in being a volunteer, contact Dianne Carroll.

**September 1:** Eric, Mike T, James H

**September 8: Volunteers needed**

**September 15: Volunteers needed**

**September 22:** Tim, Jerry

**September 29:** Syd, Michael K

~ **This page and the following – submitted by Dianne Carroll**



## SOCIAL ACTION: RAMADAN PROJECT



NOVA was invited to participate again this year in the giving of Ramadan baskets to those in local shelters. The community donated items to fill 7 large baskets. Our invitation from Uzma Farooq of the Muslim Women's Coalition described this activity in the following way:



"This is a month of giving and sharing the bounty of God with not just family and friends but also those who are facing great difficulties in our community and have ended in either abused women's shelters or the homeless shelters. Most shelters supply the families with need items on request, but what MWC Ramadan Basket Project does for each family is it gives them a gift of hope, love and care and a sense of ownership. Each family has a gift of personal hygiene and food items that may not be readily available in the shelter. They can share these gifts with their family members and know that the community cares for them.

This year **Muslim Women's Coalition (MWC)** is joined in this effort with the **International Cultural Center (ICC)**. Thank you and May God bless you! "  
Uzma Farooq

Our 7 baskets from NOVA went to the shelter with 9 families: 8 moms, 3 dads and 19 children.

Delivery of our baskets  
on August 16, 2011  
with Eric's help.



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPCOMING EVENTS

### Weekly Email Announcement Changes

As has been previously shared, Ken Chaison (with Marie Keefe as his back-up) has given up the “joy” of getting NOVA Announcements out to the Community via email after Sunday liturgies. NOVA surely owes a real debt of gratitude for all of Ken and Marie's faithful and excellent service. It's taking a committee to replace them. Thanks Peggy Becker, Alicia and Phil Cackley, Linda Christie, Jeanne Clarkson and Cathy Goldschmidt, who have formed a committee that will send future announcements. Since Peggy is soon having hip surgery, Jeanne has graciously volunteered to substitute for her for the next couple of months.

Linda Christie is the committee coordinator and will also be participating in sending out announcements. The committee has two requests, which were discussed at the August 21 General Meeting: Please have a written copy to either email or hand to the person responsible for a given week's announcements. That person will be pointed out at the end of liturgy. This will assure the accuracy of information. If everyone making announcements could try to do so in two or three sentences, it would also be appreciated. Thanks for everyone's patience as we get used to new announcement process. Since the presider and planners are listed in the NOVA newsletter and the readings at the Yahoo groups site, kindly let Linda know if you really want them continued in the Announcements online.

~ Linda Christie

### NOVA INTERCESSORY PRAYER GROUP

The group meets twice a month (usually Mondays at 7:30p.m.) at the home of Peggy and Bill Meyer. Everyone is welcome to join us. If you want to come now and then or on a regular basis, please let Peggy know.

~Peggy Meyer

### NOVA's Annual Retreat

NOVA's retreat will be held at Shrine Mont from Friday evening through Sunday lunch, September 16-18. You must make reservations ahead of time with Kopp Michelotti because we have to give Shrine Mont a count of participants in advance. Call or email Kopp. If you call, please leave a message with the names of all adults and children for whom you are reserving space and specify the ages of kids.

Shrine Mont is located one hour south of Winchester and approximately 2-1/2 hours from the Washington DC metro area, just beyond the Basye/Bryce Mountain ski resort. However, Friday afternoon traffic on I-66 might make it prudent to allow a little more time. To reach Shrine Mont, follow Route 66 West to I-81 South to Mt. Jackson (Exit #273). Turn left onto Rt. 703 (East), then right (South) on US 11, follow through town, turn right on Rt. 263 and follow approximately 15 miles to Orkney Springs.

Friday dinner will be served from 5:30 till 7:00 p.m. The first session will begin on Friday evening at 7:30 p.m. The retreat will end with lunch on Sunday at 12:30 pm.

The mountains are gorgeous and the weather cooler than in DC. It's advisable to bring a jacket; also, insect repellent, extra towels, soap, and shampoo. Feel free to bring snacks of any kind to share during Friday and Saturday evening get-togethers, as well as games and puzzles, soft drinks, juice, wine, beer. Smoking is not allowed; pets are also not allowed.

The cost for the weekend is \$180 for adults and teens, \$80 for kids 8-12, free for younger kids. NOVA doesn't want anyone to miss the retreat because of cost. We always have subsidies available; just talk to me.

~Kopp Michelotti

*Read more about the Retreat on following page.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Retreat Program Overview

We have imagined this retreat week-end to be one of expansion of visions and renewed learning, individual and communal reflection on our personal spiritual path as well the evolution of the Universe! There will be opportunities to explore together how our perception of God has changed through the years, what is the “new wine” that no longer can be contained in the “old wineskins”? How does the Divine participate with us in the evolution of all of creation? What do new insights from science and theology have to say to us about our own spiritual life and direction?

There will be prayer and song, video clips and discussion, journaling and silence, creative reflection and inspiration.. Saturday evening we will watch a new film on discovering our gifts and joining with others to be co-creators with the Divine. We are blessed to have Fr. John Haughey join us on Saturday evening and lead the reflections and liturgy on Sunday morning. We’re quite excited about going on this adventure with the community and hope that you will be too. The Friday evening Opening Event will set the stage for the beginning of the journey, please be there at 7:30 p.m. so we can start the trip together!

~ **Retreat Planning Team:** Linda Christie, Clyde Christofferson, Jeanne Clarkson, David and Gloria Mog

### Ordination Invitation

All are welcome to attend the ordination of Roman Catholic women Adele Decker Jones and Dorothy Shugrue; Donna LeMaster Rougeux will be ordained a deacon.

**Date/Time:** Saturday, Sept. 10 at 3:00 p.m.

**Location:** First Christian Church  
6165 Leasburg Pike  
Falls Church, VA 22044

If you plan to attend, email Bridget Mary.

At 1:30 p.m., Dr. Dorothy Irvin, a noted international archeologist, author and lecturer will give an address on the historical and archeological evidence of ordained women priests, bishops and deacons in the early church.

~ **Bernie Byrne**

### American Catholic Council: Follow-up Events

Those members of the community who attended the ACC conference in Detroit this past June have been meeting to see how best to share what went on in Detroit with the rest of the community.

We now have a concrete plan.

**Date/Time:** Sunday, October 2 , 7:30 p.m. and  
Sunday October 23 7:30 pm

**Location:** Barcroft Community Center  
800 Buchanan St.  
Arlington, VA 22204

We will show videos from the ACC conference and then discuss them. Joan Chittister’s closing speech to the conference will be the main topic on October 2. On October 23, we will look at Hans Kung’s video interview reflecting on Vatican II.

The meetings will be open. Invite friends.

~ **Clyde Christofferson**



## MORE REFLECTIONS ON THE ACC MEETING

### Reflections of Joe Annunziata

It seems to me that the main focus of the American Catholic Council was that American Catholics are getting increasingly irritated with the authoritarian and Vatican-dominated *ROMAN* Catholic church. This irritation appears to be a continuation of the West-East schism of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and from which Rome has not seemed to have drawn lessons of humility and ecumenism. The Roman hierarchy, since Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, has repeatedly found it necessary to be very defensive, legalistic, and dogmatic about the primacy of Peter and his successors over the church communities established by the other Apostles. Why have the church officials in Rome been so adamant and pushed elements of Christ's church to the point that disagreements appear to be irreconcilable and the dissenters are told to repent from their "heresy" or be separated from what Rome regards as the "true" church of Christ?

Is the Vatican repeating a similar mistake by telling American Catholics that their concepts of Christ's church are not compatible with what Rome regards as the "one, true, church" of Jesus Christ? Is it conceivable that the American Catholic Church could be forced to separate from the Roman-controlled hierarchy because of irreconcilable differences over such issues as the ordination of women to the priesthood, married priests, the priesthood of all baptized Christians, and equal sharing in all church governance and teaching by both lay and clerical Catholics? It seems that more and more Catholics are not happy with Rome's authoritarianism and are either not participating actively in the Roman rite, or have left it altogether for some other Christian approach that is more compatible with their understanding of Christ's church, or have stopped practicing Christianity altogether.

What I discerned from the speakers and participants at the American Catholic Council is that there are a number of American values that can be incorporated into the American way of being Catholic that are considerably different from the *ROMAN* way that has dominated the church for many centuries. These values can be seen in the American constitution and include such concepts as democratic decision-making, due process, equal treatment of all, accountability, and the right to be heard. Moreover, these values, according to many leaders of the American Catholic Council, appear to be closer to the communal and collegial character which the church had in its early Apostolic period and up through the first few centuries. It was the Emperor Constantine that brought a more rigorous and centralized discipline to the church that gave it the organizational character it has since had. During the Vatican II Council, many enlightened church leaders instituted reforms to try to recapture the character of the early church communities. However, during the nearly 50 years since the close of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, many reactionary church officials in Rome have consistently tried to undo many Vatican II reforms, maintaining that Christ's church is hierarchical and vertical, rather than democratic and horizontal.

The "universal" Catholic church appears to be at another critical juncture similar to that which it has encountered several times in its history. Will Rome allow Catholics in America, and Catholics in other parts of the world with similar desires for church reform, to restore and build upon such reforms as were initiated by the Vatican II Ecumenical Council? Or will the Rome-dominated church officials undo those church reforms, and insist on taking the church back to pre-Vatican II authoritarian discipline? Will American Catholics be forced by conscience to no longer obey Roman church officials? What would be the impact on the Roman church of another – American – schism? How would the world community of Christian practitioners survive another disruption of the "oneness" of his followers which Jesus prayed for?

These are questions which I believe the NOVA Catholic Community must consider, pray over, and decide to what extent it wants to join the struggle that is going on within the church, whether through continued support of the American Catholic Council or through support of a number of other Catholic groups engaged in church reform.



## **Reflections of John Veldhuis – Part 2**

The program of the American Catholic Council was varied, interesting, challenging, and inspiring. A number of excellent keynote speakers challenged us to think of the broader issues. At the same time there were a large number of breakout sessions which focused on narrower topics. There were so many breakout sessions that it was impossible to attend them all; we had to select which ones we should, could, and wanted to attend. Most were interesting, stimulating, stirred the imagination and caused introspection.

One of these breakout sessions, “The Church in the Modern World,” dealt with the issue of social justice. The session grew out of Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World which committed Catholics to engage the “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties “of the people of its age, especially the poor and afflicted in service of greater social justice and systemic change. The topic elicited a variety of very interesting responses among the participants. There were those who felt blessed to live in the USA which was built on the capitalist, free enterprise system. They felt that the system had allowed them “to make it” and that those who “had not made it” should be encouraged to work harder, get a job, or pull themselves up. Competition is the answer and the road to financial success. The role of the Church is to make sure the system is maintained and that abuses are rectified when they become known. The role of the church is to make sure all parties have a more or less even chance to start their own businesses and work on a successful career.

There were others who disagreed and felt equally blessed to live in the USA but believed that Christ has commanded us to love our neighbors, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked provide shelter to the homeless, etc. They felt that we have a responsibility to assist our brothers and sisters who, for whatever reason, have fallen on hard times. They felt that the very nature of competition creates winners but also many losers. This group sees the role of the Church as taking a more participatory role in the lives of needy individuals and an active relationship role in people’s lives. These folks believe that they are their “brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.”

The two points of view expressed in this breakout session highlighted a fundamental problem in our society. The common culture equates personal success with achievement and wealth based on the capitalist system while Christ and the Church are based on a more communal, social justice system, two seeming opposites. Although no consensus was reached, the discussion did evoke some deep thought. Where do we fit into this dichotomy as a Church community and where do we fit as individuals?

### **Follow-up from Judy Christofferson’s Reflections in August newsletter**

I received an email this week from an ACC participant who contacted me (along with several others) because I attended the Young Adult Outreach breakout session. The writer reported that “. . . the ACC is currently formulating its strategic plan around a number of initiatives that surfaced in Detroit, *Outreach to Young Adults* being one of them. To stimulate reflective thinking and collaboration from the grassroots, these themes are in the process of being placed on the ACC Discussion Forums within the [Assemblies Community Network](#), which is ACC's ‘social media’ site to promote communications and solicit feedback in the grassroots.” He extended an invitation to help “jump start the on-line conversation.” The goal is to develop initiatives that could include allying with initiatives such as Call to Action’s “Next Generation” project.

I thought I would pursue this and see where this leads. I’ll keep the Community posted.

## OTHER NEWS

A Toast given at the wedding of Matt Weber and Ashley Taylor in Corvallis, Oregon on August 20, 2011 by Eric and Dianne Carroll. Starred lines below were read alternately by Eric and Dianne.

- ★ We, Eric and I who love Matt very much, come as friends of the Webers and as members of the NOVA Community church that Matt grew up in.
- ★ We come to celebrate and toast Ashley and Matt for finding each other to share their values, life and aspirations.
- ★ We knew Matt (His mom called him Matty) from early on as a quiet kind nerdy little boy with thick glasses:
- ★ “A kid you could trust – not mean or clicky, different,” said a first grade classmate 34 years later. I was his sponsor during a coming of age year in Nova.
- ★ Then Matt grew up becoming a tall kind quiet gentle man..but that is not all of the story Along the way he developed artistic creativity and ways of being outside the box - always caring for others
- ★ Matt constructed a painted fabric piece for Nova’s liturgical screens; painted six-foot flowers on wooden screens for NOVA; copied a design for an Adirondack chair and went into commercial production to provide other Nova members with outdoor comfort; carved figurines for others AND, in the ultimate test, he stopped his life for awhile to care for his mom during her illness.
- ★ His creativity was not self-centered but was always done in a sharing capacity. Matt has always been directly interested in life, the great outdoors, enjoying both.
- ★ Like when he took to task a Texas line dance leader who was half-heartedly leading; Matt demanded he get in the spirit of the dance.
- ★ Matt is attentive to those who interact with him – seen well in a video of his daughter Juni’s first steps – with a smiling celebration that lights up the room as Juni walks to him; in some ways Matt has not grown up – maybe not his fault – as I sent Halloween bags with candy, spider rings and scary stuff until last year.
- ★ All of these wonderful Matt moments that we have savored in preparing for this celebration will become part of his new family as husband, parent and new age Peter Pan..
- ★ We are happy Ashley and Matt have found each other as kindred spirits to share all these qualities in creating a kind gentle creative resourceful loving home
- ★ We are happy to be here and bring best wishes to Matt, Ashley and Juni from our family and from the NOVA Catholic Community. NOVA sends its Best Wishes on this painting done by Jenny Carroll.

**Here! Here! Raise your glasses in celebration of this perfect union!**

**~Submitted by Dianne**



*See more community photos on p. 19.*

### Theology for a Small Planet

Prior Essays

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2011

#### Implications of being a Small Planet – Part 5: Aristotle and the Church -- continued

The Church is still on journey, struggling with the demons of Aristotle's cosmos. The institutional arm of the Church – its teaching authority – is still beholden to this ancient cosmos, for an Earth centric view (and its cousin, a Rome centric view) continues to prevail, notwithstanding the Church's acknowledgment that the Earth itself is not the physical center of the universe.

There have been signs that should have provided warning. Aristotle's cosmos provides a perspective that builds reliance upon what is fixed. It is no accident that Ptolemy constructed a system that preserved the fixities of the cosmos as understood by Aristotle, with Earth at the center and celestial bodies moving in appropriately perfect circular orbits. This was in accordance with the sense of the times, and the Church was quite comfortable with this view.

Another sign was the order of precedence for evidence in disputations at European universities. In a formal debate, the most persuasive evidence was accepted authority. A citation to Aristotle or another classical master was entitled to the greatest weight. Second in authority was argument based upon such authorities. And last, if the matter had not already been settled, other evidence could be presented. The inertia of this Aristotelian demon was enormous. Even after Francis Bacon, Galileo and others had demonstrated the power of turning the Medieval order of precedence on its head – so that the most persuasive argument was based upon evidence rather than authority – the old order of precedence persisted in European universities for another hundred years. Change is slow.

We are witnessing in our own times a similar persistence of Aristotle's hydra-headed cosmic demons. A particular obstacle to renewal is the sanctity of revelation as the buttress of continuity. Continuity is important, of course. The followers of Jesus argued that the Mosaic law was being fulfilled – not overturned – by the reign of God which Jesus preached. But the Jews – Paul in particular – saw in this Jesus movement challenge rather than fulfillment.

Similarly, the Church sees challenge rather than fulfillment in the work of theologians like Roger Haight and Elizabeth Johnson. These theologians are pursuing a more expansive understanding of Christ in light of the varieties of religious experience evident in today's world, a world whose fluid pluralism makes the boundaries of a fortress look archaic. Are these theologians a sign of the times, a sign of where the Spirit is leading us? Or do they lead the faithful astray?

If some of Aristotle's cosmic demons are still with us, where is the Church's *metanoia* going to come from? It may be a difficult *metanoia*, because Aristotle's world view is deeply embedded in the Church's collective psyche. On the other hand, Paul's *metanoia* on the road to Damascus was also difficult. He was blinded and could not ride his horse. It is difficult to extend that metaphor – Paul was simply a man riding a horse – to a two thousand year old institution headquartered at the Vatican. But the Spirit works in mysterious ways. Perhaps Vatican II can be viewed as a *metanoia* of the Church in response to the call of Pope John XXIII for a "bringing up to date" or *aggiornamento*.

The sanctity of what has been revealed through Jesus Christ has led the institutional Church to a particular perspective from which new ideas are evaluated. For example, the Notification about Roger Haight's *Jesus Symbol of God* demanded that these ideas "convey the immutable meaning of the dogmas as understood by the faith of the Church" or, at least, "clarify their meaning, enhancing understanding."

But Haight is on a different mission. He is bringing something new to the discussion. He helpfully lays out the question of salvation in broad terms, which would be meaningful to anyone, not just those who profess the Christian faith: "*Salvation today has to address the foundational experience of bewilderment at the ultimate meaning of existence, of the evil that characterizes human existence, of the moral failure of one's own personal existence, and of the finitude that is never secure, but is only diminished through suffering and with*

time, and culminates in the apparent annihilation that is death"<sup>1</sup>

He has a clear grasp of the unity of reality: "Salvation cannot be understood as merely a promise or as an exclusively future reality. Salvation must be something that can also be experienced now. ... Salvation must be integral; it cannot touch a so-called spiritual dimension of a person's life and not include his or her activity in this world."<sup>2</sup> And he understands the significance of Augustine's caution that religion must avoid conflict with an understanding of nature: "*Religious conceptions are not more immune from a deepening understanding of our physical universe than are the understandings of the human phenomenon itself. Biblical and classical conceptions of salvation, we have seen, run in close parallel with the conceptions of the world that were in place when they were formulated. One cannot expect less in our own time. We need a conception of salvation that is sensitive to the negative impact human development is having on our life-support system, and that takes account of scientific data concerning the human species within the larger picture of the reality of God's created cosmos*" (emphasis supplied).<sup>3</sup>

Although Haight frames his analysis in terms of other faith traditions among *homo sapiens* on planet Earth, it would be equally applicable to an unknown civilization of sentient beings elsewhere in the cosmos. If the Church were to pursue "catholicity" in light of the Big Bang, the inquiries of Roger Haight in *Jesus Symbol of God* would be helpful and constructive.

But the Notification was not thinking in these terms, any more than Paul was open to the followers of Jesus before his journey to Damascus. The institutional Church is facing a "road to Damascus" awakening in its self understanding of role with regard to what Christ revealed. Despite historical development in this self understanding over the last two thousand years, absorption of the reality of cosmic evolution and the prospect of other sentient civilizations elsewhere in the cosmos will be difficult for the institutional Church.

That difficulty is evident in another conflict between the teaching authority of the institutional Church and a theologian. This further conflict is more recent than the 2004 Vatican action against Roger Haight. Just this year the US bishops' Committee on Doctrine has acted against Elizabeth

Johnson's *Quest for the Living God*. The book has been in circulation since 2007 and has been widely acclaimed and used.

Johnson takes the Christian worldview of the Trinity – a mystery that somehow grasps an incomprehensible God – and shows in a series of examples how the continuing quest for the living God is being played out. Her analysis and description serves as yet another confirmation of God's imminence through cosmic evolution.

But the Committee of Doctrine takes an approach that misses the forest for the trees. They pick up on Johnson's emphasis on the otherness of God. She waxes eloquent on the incomprehensibility of this mystery we call God<sup>4</sup>. I confess to having a reaction similar to that of the Committee. My marginal notes mildly disagree with her emphasis. My own sense was that "comprehension is not about God, but about God's sharing an existence that is comprehensible." There is something important about our increasingly evident capacity to comprehend the cosmos, as Einstein's famous comment suggests<sup>5</sup>.

The bishops' Committee took what Johnson said as an opportunity to reiterate – by way of contrast – Catholic teaching about "knowing God." We all remember the Baltimore catechism's answer to the fundamental question of our reason for being: "to know God, to love God, and to serve God." While we cannot know God fully, that does not mean that God is wholly other and incomprehensible as Johnson says.

But, of course, that's not what Johnson said. The whole point of the examples she describes in *Quest* is to demonstrate the vitality of our continuing journey toward comprehension. Johnson says: "We will never reach the end of exploring, having figured it all out."<sup>6</sup> But this is not to say that our knowledge is not increasing, as if we were simply meandering in a vast wilderness, getting nowhere.

So why did the Committee take this tack? Perhaps they viewed *Quest* as an appropriate opportunity to fulfill their obligation to teach.

The Committee also took issue with Johnson's view of evolution. Johnson says: "*Modern forms of theism assume that God intervenes in the world at will to accomplish divine purpose apart from natural processes. But the scientific picture of the universe indicates that this is not necessary. Nature*



*is actively organizing itself into new forms at all levels.”<sup>7</sup>*

What Johnson is describing here is the creativity of a pregnant cosmos. This is not a clock work, as the determinism of Newtonian mechanics might conceive it. We are being graced with a succession of what I have called “thermoentropic novelties,” including our own consciousness, and also Jesus Christ.

But the Committee misses entirely what Johnson is saying. Johnson is speaking about an integrated reality, and the best the Committee can do is say, “*The physical cannot account for the non-physical, and the self-organization of created realities does not explain itself. ... It is the spiritual nature of the human soul that allows human beings, through their bodily senses, intellectually to know the truth and freely to will the good and so act upon it.*”<sup>8</sup>

The distinction between body and soul is what *resonates* when all you have to work with is an Aristotelian (or even Newtonian) view of the cosmos. There is nothing unusual or amiss about this. Our conscious connection to the Spirit and to the living God is *real*. But if we are set in the ways of Aristotle’s cosmos, and see that cosmos as “physical reality”, then a distinct “spirituality” is necessary to account for reality in its fullness.

But the evolving cosmos that has come to light in the last fifty years makes possible a different conception of reality, one that integrates “physical reality” and “spirituality” in one unfolding reality. Johnson grasps this; the Committee does not. The Committee (and, indeed, the institutional Church more broadly) is still working with Aristotle’s cosmos.

Let me add a third example. Roger Haight and *Symbol* is the first example. Elizabeth Johnson and *Quest* is the second example. The third example is the new Roman Missal. All three examples demonstrate a teaching authority that is burying the talents of the Church.

The Roman Missal project began so well. The International Commission on English and the Liturgy (ICEL) was charged with updating the order of the mass that had been put together right after Vatican II. It was understood that the initial post Vatican II changes were necessary but rough hewn. It was time to refine that initial effort, and it was appropriate that this be done by those closest to the language being spoken – a good use of the principle

of subsidiarity: decisions should be made at lower levels, if possible.

So ICEL worked diligently and in 1998 produced a revised order of the mass. But the Vatican was not happy with it, and sent the draft back with instructions that – in the end – could be translated as “kindly undertake to render more accurately the beautiful Latin text of St. Jerome.” St. Jerome? Latin? What is the point of going backward when God’s handiwork – as evident in cosmic evolution – is going in the opposite direction? It is the demon of Aristotle’s cosmos, all over again.

Are we living through another time where convenient preconceptions blind the institutional Church to what God is telling us – what a loving God is opening up to our comprehension – through our observations of God’s handiwork in the cosmos? Did we not go through this once before, with Ptolemy and an Earth-centric view of the cosmos? Do we not remember Copernicus and Galileo? Is what we see with Roger Haight, with Elizabeth Johnson, and with the Roman Missal: a reprise on the Church’s affection for Ptolemy?

There are differences, of course. It’s not about the physics of the cosmos. We are well beyond claiming that the Earth is the center of the universe in a physical sense. But what is the cosmos? Is it all physics, or reducible to physics? Cosmic evolution cannot be reduced to physics. As Bernard Lonergan points out, creation is ongoing. Reductionism evaporates as soon as reality ceases to be a subdivision of the “already out there now.”<sup>9</sup> It now appears that God has graced us not with a “created order” but rather with a pregnant cosmos that is unfolding into the fullness of reality. There is a more integral connection between Heaven and Earth. It is time to re-think – or, perhaps better, re-imagine – the central realities of existence, and our corresponding “deposit of faith.”

A loving God, the Holy Spirit, and the real presence of Christ call our hearts to a different possibility. Is it possible that God did not simply create the cosmos, and then place us in it? Is it possible that God grew us out of the cosmos, as if to emphasize the point – the teaching lesson from the Big Bang – that the cosmos itself is alive and pregnant?

And this teaching raises the suggestion that this fertile cosmos is still pregnant. What is next? The ability to ask this question and to understand that

not even the cosmos knows the answer is the difference between life and clockwork.

So why is the institutional Church, the teaching authority of the Church, taking a Ptolemaic view of God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ?

The teachings of the Church, as presently formulated, are workmanlike but not awesome. God is awesome, and the teachings of the Church should be expected to keep up. Is God changing? Or is that question even appropriate for a God of love? In any event our comprehension is getting better. The lesson of the Big Bang is that our very existence is evolving, and this evolution has direction. There is a progression from stars to galaxies to life ... and then what? If we take off our scientific blinders and allow the spiritual side of our consciousness to speak there begins to *resonate* a different, at least for me.

Look at God's handiwork! Faith lets me look at the cosmos and ask what this loving God is up to. I don't have to play scientist and wait for the next piece of evidence. I see "1, 2, 3 ..." – and that is enough. It was enough for Lonergan, and it is enough for me. The cosmos is unfolding. And if the cosmos is unfolding – if a pregnant cosmos is the way God is working – then why not an unfolding of revelation? Why not an unfolding Church?

This makes more sense to me than a "deposit of faith" maintained by the Church, a Church kept free from error by a gracious Spirit. What a curse it must be to be kept free from error! Being alive is making things better, not being perfect. The unfolding cosmos – the pregnant and unfolding cosmos – is about making things better, not being free from error. We should banish "free from error" from our lexicon, from the questions we ask about ourselves and about our Church. It is sufficient to make things better.

How would we treat our children, our sons and daughters, who are seeking what a loving God is sharing, a fullness of existence? How do we respond to their explorations? Is our first concern about change from the "deposit of faith" that has been handed down? I suppose so, if we see God as changeless. Do we not encourage the small improvements in the everyday life of our children?

What about Galileo? Was he not a child of the Church? Did the Church respond to his explorations appropriately? Or, perhaps, appropriately as best the Church understood its

lights at the time. But if we had it to do over again, how would the Church respond? And if our children today have some of Galileo in them – and I'm thinking of Roger Haight and Elizabeth Johnson, among others – how should the Church respond?

We need a guide for responding appropriately. Have we no such guide? Interestingly, the documents of Vatican II identify such a guide. It is not fleshed out, it has not grown to adulthood, but the kernel is there.

Let me approach this kernel from a different angle. Look out at the night sky, and then look at your hand. The cosmos is large beyond our imaginings, and the evidence is not something you or I can see, but it is passing through our fingers nonetheless. It is the cosmic background radiation that has told us so much about the awesome cosmos in that night sky. We see back in time fourteen billion years; we see a universe so isotropic on large scales that our own evolution on Earth is unlikely to be unique. If there were but one Earth-like planet in every galaxy there could be a hundred billion such opportunities for sentient life.

And the eyes of faith tell us more. Does it not *resonate* through the eyes of faith that the reason for being of the cosmos has something to do with God and with us? The traditional formulation is that we are created in God's image, but cosmic evolution says something more than the Garden of Eden story. I believe a loving God is sharing existence with independent beings able not only to love one another but also to comprehend this existence, thereby imaging this loving and comprehending God. The ongoing and developmental nature of this sharing is important, and provides an alternative way of understanding a reality that the Catholic tradition sees as a "deposit of faith" preserved by the Spirit "free from error."

And one way to see this alternative is to imagine another sentient civilization, somewhere out in this vast cosmos, on its own journey toward the same sharing with the same loving and comprehending God. Jesus of Nazareth is not knowable to this other civilization, even if the Christ, the Incarnate Word, is present everywhere. Surely it would be a gratuitous arrogance for those of us on planet Earth to suppose that revelation for some distant civilization is dependent upon us. As a practical matter, communication with a distant galaxy is problematic (because the speed of light is

too slow to get there and back in any reasonable amount of time), and getting more problematic because the cosmos is expanding at an accelerating rate (more and more, distant galaxies will be receding from us at greater than the speed of light, making communication impossible).

So how can this work? This distant civilization will ultimately confront the reality that they, too, are not alone in the cosmos. The same cosmic background radiation that is passing through our fingers is passing through theirs, as well, whether they are fingers or some other form of bodily appendage. If they have the capacity for science, they, too, will recognize the problem, and will conclude – as we must conclude – that the mechanism of revelation must be symmetrical. That is, the mechanism must be such that it works both for us and for them.

A mechanism of revelation that satisfies the criterion of symmetry – which, by the way, is perhaps the most powerful and productive principle in all of science – is simple, elegant, and dynamic. It explains the different places we have come on our various journeys. It explains why we once thought that being “free from error” was something to be grasped at. Any distant civilization, with its own grasp of the living God, looking out at the starry night sky and imagining us, will at some point in their developmental progression find the same mechanism.

What is this mechanism and how does it work? The simple way to put it is this: God did not come out of the sky, see these hapless human beings, and decide to give them a soul, in the Garden of Eden or otherwise. This soul or conscience or whatever name you want to give it has been coming into being in this cosmic evolutionary process. It is an integral part of our consciousness, not something to be stored on a shelf somewhere and treated separately as the object of salvation. In the terms I have been using in this series of essays, this is why we are able to say that something *resonates*, or that one alternative *resonates more* than another. The alternatives that *resonate* are those that prick our conscience, and that respond to our yearning to love and to make this world a better place. Like any other capability, it improves with use.

Jesus of Nazareth *resonated* with his followers. If we imagine some distant sentient civilization having a consciousness that *resonates*, we can speculate that the living Word might become

incarnate in whatever form may be appropriate for this distant civilization. The *resonant* consciousness comes first, and enables appreciation of the incarnate Word. Without a prior *resonant* consciousness, would there be anything for the living Word to incarnate into?

What would be the content of revelation to a sentient civilization in this distant galaxy? Presumably the teachings of the living Word would *resonate*, and followers of an incarnate Word would be able to have an Easter-like experience of a real presence of the living God. That assumes, of course, an Incarnation in this distant galaxy, with or without some event equivalent to a Crucifixion. With perhaps many billions of such sentient civilizations, all journeying toward the same God and a sharing of the same existence, one might suppose that every possible way for a loving God to share existence would come to pass. Perhaps that is the reason for such a vast cosmos.

What kind of “deposit of faith” would square with the work of a loving God in a distant civilization? As Christians we have come to take for granted that we proclaim Jesus Christ, but Jesus himself proclaimed that the reign of God was at hand. Does our “deposit of faith” overemphasize Jesus? Are we too much focused on proclaiming the proclaimer and not enough focused on the message Jesus himself proclaimed?

On the other hand, the Incarnation is significant beyond the content of the message or, perhaps, gives the message its meaning. It is too easy for us – and perhaps also for a distant sentient civilization – to assume that we are the end of God’s creation. Recall the essays “...: 1, 2, 3 ...” and “...: ... 4, 5, 6.” We have physics (1), we have chemistry (2), we have biology (3), and now we have *resonant* consciousness (4). And that is it; that’s the end.

No, that is not the end. Christ, the Incarnate Word (5), is a thermoentropic novelty that goes beyond our consciousness, even if our consciousness is necessary to appreciate it. It would be prudent to remain open to yet another surprise in the unfolding of God’s creation. Our own theology speaks of a “second coming” of Christ, which may not be like the first. What about the theology of sentient beings in a distant galaxy? Or, judging from the situation on planet Earth, perhaps there are a number of theologies in this distant civilization. A symmetrical mechanism for revelation accounts for these as well.

Beyond the Trinitarian elements (God, Incarnate Word, Spirit) of a “deposit of faith” it is certainly reasonable to treat the “People of God” as an expansive term inclusive of sentient beings throughout the cosmos. But an institutional teaching authority in a distant civilization would not be the same as what we know as the Church on Earth, with bishops in various places on this Earth and a Pope in the city of Rome. We may rely upon an institutional Church here to serve as fiduciary for the “deposit of faith”, and it is conceivable that a distant civilization could rely upon a similar institutional reality.

Who, then, is responsible for the universal “deposit of faith”, and what exactly is that “deposit”? As soon as reliance is placed upon a localized institution symmetry across the galaxies is lost. Symmetry is also lost if reliance is placed upon Jesus of Nazareth rather than the Incarnate Word. It is the same ineffable God, but that’s the easy part. The particulars of Jesus of Nazareth and the keys of Peter pose the problem. How can symmetry be preserved?

It turns out to be simple. Just forget about being “free from error” and instead think “whither”<sup>10</sup> – where are we going? There are three steps to arriving at a symmetrical approach to the journey toward union with a loving and living God. First, from our perspective on planet Earth, we can make the same distinction between the Spirit and the institutional Church as between the Incarnate Word and Jesus. A distant civilization may (or may not) have its own version of Jesus, but the same Word made flesh. Similarly, there may be one institution here and another for a distant civilization, but the same Spirit that guides them both.

Step two. How does the Spirit work? If it works through the institution, then we have the same symmetry problem. We end up with two “deposits of faith.” It’s like having two Popes, even if they are too far away from each other to be able to communicate. We need a mechanism that does something more creative than choosing between or among competing Popes.

We have known about this problem for some time. This is why the Church speaks of “reception” of its teachings. Vatican II acknowledged a sense of the faithful, a *sensus fidelium*, operating over time. And while the Vatican II documents carefully constrain the *sensus fidelium* within the arms of the

institutional Church, the acknowledgment of the *sensus fidelium* is a significant step forward.

“Step two” adds one further thought: this very constraint – and, indeed, each one of the various stages of a journeying Church over the course of history – is validated by the *sensus fidelium*. It is the *sensus fidelium* that holds the “deposit of faith” and validates the institutional Church. It is the *sensus fidelium* through which the Spirit works, as messy as that is. Vatican II spoke presciently when it shifted emphasis to the people of God. That shift has not yet been fully absorbed. But it is necessary for comprehending the utterly awesome character of a pregnant God able to spawn other sentient civilizations in this vast cosmos.

There is a third step. How does the *sensus fidelium* work? The people of God are many. How do we avoid cacophony and chaos? Won’t there be many different interpretations of the Spirit among the people of God? Indeed, have not the people of God broken up into a multitude of different religions and denominations on this account? Yes, of course, but not to worry. What are five or ten religions on Earth compared to billions of different sentient civilizations across the cosmos, each on its own journey toward the same living God?

There is a method to the *sensus fidelium*, a method that has two attributes. First, the method acknowledges that the integrity of the journey comes first. Both the individual and the community, and the Church as a whole, are entitled to give priority to the integrity of the journey. It is not necessary to be in the same place; it is sufficient to be on journey toward the same God. Second, the mechanism of *resonant choice* moves the journey forward, step by step. Different communities may be in different places, taking different steps, and in that sense the *sensus fidelium* is of the community. This is symmetry at work, and overcomes the problems of an Earth centric bias.

Where, then, is the unity of the Church? The mechanism of the *sensus fidelium* finds unity in the same God toward which all journey. Unity pertains to the people of God, rather than to the institutional Church. This approach is broad enough to encompass sentient beings in distant civilizations.

Admittedly, the journey of the Roman Catholic Church is currently at a different place. The Church has been at this place for some time, since long before the Big Bang and long before it was plausible to consider the symmetry requirements of



sentient life in distant galaxies. Recall the Council of Nicea, and the Emperor Constantine's concern about the unity of the Roman Empire and the unity of the Empire's Church. It is in this environment that the bishops of the Church addressed the problem of "many different interpretations." I don't want to overemphasize Constantine's influence, because the Church was already moving in this direction. It seemed important to get the "deposit of faith" right. The politics of moving in this direction did not concern them. In retrospect we can observe that the victors wrote the history, and that our present generation has grown up in the shadow of the victors.

It was not simply the bishops – the fiduciaries of the institutional Church – who were concerned about the problem of "many different interpretations". It is fair to say that this difficulty was recognized by the faithful at large. The integrity and survival of the entire community was believed to be at stake, especially after the collapse of Rome in 476. Because of this the sense of the faithful, the *sensus fidelium*, ratified and validated the concept that the institutional Church should serve as a single point of reference for the "deposit of faith." The politics of the institutional Church became quite important, if not dispositive. The procedural advantage of a single decision making body cannot be ignored.

The result is one institution and one teaching. The "deposit of faith" is what the teaching authority says it is, subject to the *sensus fidelium*. That has worked well enough for a long time, but it doesn't take account of other sentient civilizations elsewhere in the cosmos.

So the Roman Catholic Church is at a crossroads. The "Rome has spoken" approach still has much support among the faithful. But the Church has a weakness that will ultimately lead to agreement that the politics of "Rome has spoken" needs to be replaced by the *sensus fidelium*. That weakness – if it is to be called a weakness – is the principle of universality. That is the meaning of the word "catholic". For many other Christian denominations the emphasis is on the community – their communities – not upon the people of God writ large. For the Roman Catholic Church, the people of God writ large is a matter of considerable importance, as demonstrated by *Lumen Gentium*<sup>11</sup>.

We have not yet figured out how this is going to work. Vatican II, however, was prescient. It did

more than give priority to the people of God. It did more than acknowledge the *sensus fidelium*. It also advocated the use of structural entities – parish and diocesan councils – that could bring the *sensus fidelium* out from the shadows. Few bishops have seen the long term potential for such encouragement of parish and diocesan councils, but such things are in the cards of cosmic evolution.

One sign of the times is the American Catholic Council, which met last June in Detroit over Pentecost weekend to pursue further development of what John XXIII opened up at Vatican II. Joan Chittister, in a speech on the last day of the weekend, captured the prevailing imagination of the assembly by recounting advice from those ancient upon the land we love: "In the Native American tradition, at the time of initiation, the elders tell the younger, 'as you go the way of life, you will see a great chasm – ...'. She paused, allowing the image presented to the young Indian initiates to gather in the minds of the audience. And then she repeated the one word of advice given by the elders to the younger: "... **jump!**" And then Sr. Joan concluded with a rousing exhortation: "For all our sakes, speak up, burn brightly, go on. For the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of the Church, for all our sakes, for the sake of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God and the power of Pentecost, for God's sake, make a leap!" After a standing ovation of several minutes, she returned to the podium and said to the assembly who knew they were listening to prophetic words, "you are my hope."

The NOVA Community is caught up in these signs of the times. In September, the annual retreat at Shrine Mont will be a prayerful and low key excursion – titled "A Cosmic Adventure" – into the fullness of reality that comes from contemplating cosmic evolution. Then, on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and again on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the community will meet to hear about what went on at the ACC meeting in Detroit. See announcements elsewhere in this newsletter for all these events.

We are limited beings, perhaps more (or perhaps less) limited than other sentient civilizations is the cosmos, but limited nonetheless. The Spirit of a loving God understands our limitations and works with us, like a parent. Is not this what Jesus meant when he said there were things he had not said but that would be revealed by the Holy Spirit?

We are not alone. We live in families, and communities. We discuss these choices, and revisit the question of *resonance*. On many points the community is not all of one voice, nor is it always clear whether a common community voice is necessary or appropriate. One community within the people of God may be of one voice and another community may be of a different voice, and communities may split on this account, and it may still not be clear whether the point of difference merits a common community voice. Where is the *sensus fidelium* in these voices?

These matters are cause for concern, especially for those who see the institutional Church as a sign of unity of the people of God. But, as I have tried to show, there is challenge and opportunity here as well. The demons of Aristotle's cosmos may still be with us, but perhaps not for that much longer. Cosmic evolution has come into its own in the last fifty years, and its implications are entering the public consciousness.

We are not only individuals. We are part of the people of God. I am arguing that the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God has given birth to the institutional Church, and sustains it. As the people of God, do we not love the Church, just as we as individuals love our own children? Granted, individual members of the Body of Christ have a variety of views about the institutional Church, but the larger people of God is a different matter. Is there not room for love in our larger collective self?

The institutional Church has arrived at a chasm, and needs the admonition of wise elders to screw up its courage, and jump. But there are none that this child recognizes as elders. The *sensus fidelium* is on the horizon, but the Church does not yet claim it as a parent. The Church believes that the revelation of Jesus Christ is complete, and that further working out of this revelation is a matter of details. Important details, to be sure, but details under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit. Blessed Pope John XXIII and Vatican II nudged the institutional Church in a direction more open to a future both uncertain and gracious. But the chasm remains.

There is precedent in science for the Church's position about completeness and details. At the end of the nineteenth century the most noted physicist of his time, Lord Kelvin, gave a speech recounting all that physics had achieved. Newton's laws of motion described the workings of matter both here and in the heavens. Maxwell's equations described

the phenomena of electricity and magnetism in a way that brought them together and explained light, as well. The basic laws of nature had been discovered, Lord Kelvin opined. Henceforth, the task of science would be a matter of working out the details of these basic laws.

Lord Kelvin's speech was poorly timed. Within a few years a clerk at the Swiss patent office, Albert Einstein, published papers that added relativity and quantum theory – more than details – to the repertoire of physics. Lord Kelvin's speech has been a lesson for students of physics ever since.

Theologians like Roger Haight and Elizabeth Johnson are continuing to nudge the institution toward a more Spirit filled approach toward a chasm that is worth jumping.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Haight, S.J. *Jesus Symbol of God* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1999), pp. 354-355.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (Continuum: New York, NY, 2007), pp. 34-37, in the chapter "Gracious Mystery, Ever Greater, Ever Nearer".

<sup>5</sup> "One may say 'the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility' ... the world of our sense experience is comprehensible. The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle.", from the article "Physics and Reality", published in the March 1936 issue of the Journal of the Franklin Institute, at p. 351; reprinted in *Ideas and Opinions* (Crown Publishers: New York, NY, 1954) at p. 290, 292.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Committee of Doctrine, USCCB, Statement on *Quest for the Living God* (24 March 2011), at p. 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 257.

<sup>10</sup> A term used to great effect by Johnson in expounding upon the teaching approach of Karl Rahner. See *Quest*, pp. 35-38

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter II, "On the People of God," ¶¶9-17.

## RECENT NOVA PHOTOS



Beautiful altar setting



Community blesses those who will be traveling



Blessing Ana and Joe who will leave the community for college



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