



nova notes

NOVA Catholic Community

November 2011

Chair Notes...

What happened? It seems as if just yesterday we were on vacation and gardens were in bloom, and now we're sweeping piles of leaves off the porch. Our calendars have notes scribbled in every box, and Safeway shelves of Halloween candy and costumes are already crowded with Thanksgiving and Christmas items. It's hardly November. Isn't it too early to feel overwhelmed? I suppose I should remember that it's always like this. Multiple events and visitors and change rushing toward me. Too much to fit into the days or weeks available. It's quicksand, and I will soon feel myself sinking. And a cup of coffee doesn't help.

Thankfully, I'm inspired by a conversation or homily, or the dazzle of a maple tree dyed crimson by the season. Whatever form it takes, I am rescued, finding solid ground to stand on, reminded that living is not about the calendar; it's about the moment. About purpose. And I always find that solid ground, that purpose in NOVA. And as John Haughey and the dialogue reminded us recently, our lives have purpose, not in waiting for something (our salvation) that has already happened, but *in the now* because that is what is real.

The recipients of Dream Scholarships are young people who face that challenge, studying and working and *living with purpose in the now*. They believe that one day they will fulfill their dreams of education and careers in their adopted country, thanks to Emma's nonprofit Dream Project NOW. The community had an opportunity to get better acquainted with these courageous students when they joined us this past weekend at the liturgy.

Another example comes from the recent NOVA discussions about the ACC meeting in Detroit. The videos of Hans Kung and Joan Chittister, and the stories of our participants, enabled us to share a bit of the exhilaration and hope they experienced. Again the challenge is how to *manifest the now*—not waiting, but continuing to do better ourselves and to give support to emerging small communities and church reform.

Sister Adriana needed financial help to foster education in South Sudan, and the community responded with cash immediately, committing itself to raise the necessary funds later. Have you heard? We can look forward to another celebration of *Men Who Cook* in the spring. It would take pages to list all the ways NOVA and its members have committed themselves to peace and social justice projects, giving evidence to their belief in the *already, the now*, as they respond to the many calls for help.

Whatever challenge a community faces as it attempts to act thoughtfully and consistently in the *now*, it is even harder to apply this principal in our personal lives—to act *as if* rather than be sidetracked by worries or fear or whatever it is that makes us hesitate. I don't know about you, but I often find my vision, my choices, blurred and confused, instead of being guided by the spirit. And as for the calendar—well, I'm going to look carefully at one day, one crowded box at a time, and do my best to respond to what is purposeful and *now*. But may I have that cup of coffee first?

~Teddi Ahrens, Co-chair



November 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

Announcements Coordinator Linda Christie

Newsletter Editor Judy Christofferson

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.

- 3 Ken Chaison
- 4 Tom Marron
- 5 Emma Violand-Sanchez
- 6 Marie Schum-Brady
Joe Houck
- 8 Rosemarie Annunziata
Phyllis Houck
- 12 George Lowrey
- 17 Jennifer Powell
- 22 Carmela Ormando
- 25 Bernie Byrne
- 27 Mary Gillmarten
Mike Timpane
Natalia Mercado-Violand
- 29 Rich Rosenberg
Julia Hainer-Violand
- 30 Arthur Rosenberg

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

NOVA is praying for. . .

Eve Birch and her daughter as they settle into a new home and school in Martinsburg, Virginia.

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.

Walt Landry, who at the Virginia Hospital Center recovering from congestive heart failure, and would also appreciate cards and brief visits.

Elsie Shade, mother of Marlene, who recently had heart surgery.

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

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.

November Music Liaison Linda Rosenberg

November 6 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dan Madigan, SJ

Planners: Nancy and John Veldhuis

November 13 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Quinn Conners, O.Carm.

Planner: Victoria Robinson

November 20 – Christ the King

Gerry Stockhausen, SJ

Planners: Judy and Clyde Christofferson

November 27 – First Sunday of Advent

Quinn Conners, O.Carm.

Planners: Teddi Ahrens and Carmela Ormando

NOTE: Cycle B Begins



Cackley family singing at liturgy

December Music Liaison Linda Rosenberg

December 4 – Second Sunday of Advent

Dan Madigan, SJ

Planners: Gen and Mike Timpane

December 11 – Third Sunday of Advent

Jim Hug, SJ

Planners: Cathy & Larry Goldschmidt

December 18 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Gerry Stockhausen, SJ

Planner: Rose Barrett

December 25 – Christmas Mass

10:00 a.m. – Goodwin House West

Bailey's Crossroads

3440 S. Jefferson St.

Falls Church, VA 22041

Priest and Planners TBA

NOTE: No Liturgy on Sunday, January 1 as Kenmore will be closed.

Call for Liturgy Planners – 2011-2012

Sign-ups at our annual “Liturgy Lottery” have gone very well, thanks to Gen Timpane’s able guidance (to say nothing of the cookies) and everyone’s willingness to serve. We are **immediately in need of Planners for the Christmas Liturgy**. Additionally, there are several summer Sundays to be claimed as well as November 11 and 25, 2012. We are asking each household to take two liturgies during the year if at all possible. Please let Gen know if you are able to claim any of the remaining “orphan Sundays”. Thanks.

~Gloria Mog

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AND UPCOMING EVENTS

October Gunston Schedule

NOVA volunteers distribute bags of non-perishable food, cereal provided by the Community, and perishable items such as eggs, milk, and meat that are picked up at the Arlington Food Assistance Center warehouse on the night of distribution. Produce items are picked up every other week by Eric Carroll at the produce markets downtown (and funded by the NOVA Peace and Justice budget). The distribution takes place at the Gunston Middle School Recreation Center in Arlington. NOVA volunteers have been active in this project for many years. More than one volunteer is needed. There is a seasoned volunteer every Thursday, so this is your chance to try out your skills. Having someone who speaks Spanish is a real plus for each of the teams. **Please help.** If you are interested in being a volunteer, please contact Dianne.

November Volunteer Schedule

November 3: Eric

November 10: Tim, Jerry,

November 17: Ormando Kane (s)

November 22: Syd, Glen (**Note:** Volunteers will distribute food on Tuesday because Thanksgiving Day is on Thursday, Nov. 24.)

Addresses of NOVA College Students

Our NOVA new college freshman would love a message from home.

Ben Brady
1701 College Ave
PO Box 1748
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

College of William and Mary
Joe Kane
CSU 0356
110 Sadler Center
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Ana Cackley
404 Dillard
Charlottesville, VA 22904-2117

Tar Sands/Stop the Pipeline Event

On Sunday, **November 6**, there will be a gathering in Lafayette Park in DC and an encircling of the White House at **2:00 p.m.** to protest the Keystone XL construction of pipeline that would carry tar sands oil from Canada to Texas refineries. The proposed pipeline runs the risk of ruptures and leakages that could befoul the environment..

Peacemaker Dinner and Award

Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore invites you to attend its fourth annual **Peacemaker of the Year Mass and Award Dinner** on **Sunday, November 13, at 6:00 p.m.**, at Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, 2700 South 19th Street, Arlington, VA 22204. This year's award recipient is Jeni Stepanek, pro-life and peace advocate. For more information and dinner reservations, please visit www.paxchristimetrodc.org and click on the lead article headline.

Christmas Crafts Sale



Before and following the liturgy on Sunday, **December 4**, Co-partners of Campesinas will hold a crafts sale.

This is an excellent opportunity to shop for gifts for family and friends while also supporting those who produce the items in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala.

~Archer Heinzen

SURVEY AND COMMITMENT: SOUTH SUDAN PROJECT

The Peace and Social Justice Team distributed a survey based on community brainstorming on ways to support our commitment to the South Sudan Educational Support Project. The survey was an effort to both narrow down the strategies and to allow folks to name those that they would be willing to help with.

Many thanks to the 30 people who responded. Although we had asked that the strategies be prioritized, most were not, so here are the top three:

- Men Who Cook
- An event that would offer entertainment, e.g., skits, music, etc. that would involve younger folks as well as old-timers and would include food such as wine and finger foods. (Alicia reports her musician friends are wondering when they might do a concert with us again.)
- Event to educate us/others about S. Sudan and the region. Speakers, could include S. Sudan or region activities, movies, food, etc. Can we connect with S. Sudanese living in US?

We also asked which partnerships the community should pursue. The most interest was shown in:

- Establish relationship with the (soon to be constituted) embassy of S. Sudan. Enlist their help or advice in fundraising (e.g., auction/raffle lunch with ambassador, sell items:handicrafts, oil futures)
- Other Intentional Eucharistic Communities, even the non-local ones (Should we get information from websites or other ways?)
- Muslim population because (1) it would be good for them to see a model of “Men Who Cook”; (2) promote interfaith activities – Sudan and S. Sudan are divided along Christian-Muslim lines

The Peace and Social Justice Team is following up with people who indicated an interest in helping and will work with the community on where we go from here.

Many thanks for your ample creativity and vision of support for those in need

~The Peace and Social Justice Team: Joe Annunziata, Dianne and Eric Carroll, Marie Keefe, Kopp and Cece Michelotti, Meg Tuccillo, Cathy Showalter, John Veldhuis, Tim White,



Recent NOVA Peace and Social Justice Events

AFAC (Arlington Food Assistance Center) designated September as “Hunger Awareness Month.” Every Sunday during that month we collected non perishable, needed items to give to the food bank at the end of the month. Our donations were delivered on September 26 and weighed in at **257** pounds! Thanks to everyone for shopping especially for the items that were needed by the clients.

On October 23 NOVA members participated in a “Homeless Mini Walkathon” after the liturgy at Kenmore School. Jan Sacharko, Director of Development for ASPAN, (Arlington Street Peoples Assistance Network), gave a short presentation about the needs of the homeless in Arlington and brought Walkathon t-shirts and banners to carry on the walk.



On October 30, five “dreamer” students who are part of the Dream Project, Inc. spoke briefly during the liturgy about their experience as students of this project. The project provides post-secondary education scholarships and mentoring for students who were born outside of the United States or have a parent born outside the United States.

~Dianne Carroll

In Memoriam

November 1 is All Saints Day. It's a good time to recall all those NOVA members (including members of our Padre Cadre and Bishop Russell) who have passed away. Some of the people of this list were with us for short periods, others for many years. We were blessed by their presence and lovingly remember them all.

Bob and Grace Birch

Paul Birch

Rose Birch

Madeleine Bonsignore

Julie Byrne

Father Bill Callahan

Mary Chaison

Tony and Pat Chavez

Michael De Groot

John DeOrnellas

Gil Donahue

Jim Furlong

Fran and Jim Grady

Dean Houck

Father Bob Hovda

Arlene Hynes

Marcy Jacomet

Father Phil Land

Tom Leckey

Tom Lowrey

Ruth Mausert-Mooney

Brenda McCormick

Louis Mendez

Paty Violand Mercado

Michelle Murray

Father Aubrey Osborne

Father Al Perreira

Jim Provost

Nathaneal Robert

Frances Schimpf

Grover and Nancy Stock

Peggy Taylor

Jim Thomas

Lisa Todaro

Henrietta Walsh

Marjorie Weber

George White

Kate Wholey

Jesse Zinn

Bishop John Russell of Richmond

Thank You Note and Willie Nelson Peace Song

Sept. 29, 2010

Dear Ken + NOVA
Community

Thanks for the thoughts
and prayers when I broke
my ankle in June. It's
not been a speedy recovery -
but I'm doing really well and
am back on my feet, though
moving at a snail's pace (H)

Thanks even more for
the never-ending love and
support to my dear
sister Kate. She is held
together by grace -
including the NOVA family's



presence in her life -
no matter how far from
home she might be.

Vincent

Best to
see!

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)
Plain near Auvers, 1890
73.5 x 92 cm
New Pinakothek, Munich
Courtesy of Arothek

Bigid/
Brid

GALISON
NEW YORK
WWW.GALISON.COM

2729/135
PRINTED IN HONG KONG

Willie Nelson Song

There were requests for the lyrics to Willie Nelson song, "What Ever Happened to Peace on Earth," which Bob O'Toole read at the Lighting of the Peace Candle and Prayer part of the October 23rd liturgy. Below are the first two verses of the song. You can hear Willie singing the entire song on You Tube if you Google Willie Nelson and the song title. (editor)

*There's so many things going on in the
world
Babies dying,
Mothers crying,
How much oil is one human life worth?
And what ever happened to peace on earth?*

*We believe everything that they tell us.
They're gonna' kill us
So we gotta' kill them first.
But I remember a commandment,
Thou shall not kill.
How much is that soldier's life worth?
And whatever happened to peace on earth?*

Theology for a Small Planet

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2011

Prior Essays

Comprehending Reality: A Work in Progress

How intelligible is reality if it makes no difference whether a neighbor's child lives or dies? How intelligible is reality if the test is not whether the child lives or dies but whether we rejoice with the neighbor if the child lives and mourn with the neighbor if the child dies?

Such intelligibility would take some getting used to. There is a certain serenity made possible by an acceptance of what we cannot change, but it is unsettling to suppose that a loving God accepts such things. Are we not here precisely to make this world a better place? The neighbor whose child is suffering from cancer is in pain from waiting, and from fearing the worst. Is it too much for the neighbor to hope, and for us to hope – and pray – with the neighbor?

What can we do? There is a prayer – sometimes attributed to St. Augustine – which asks God for “the courage to change what I can change” and “the serenity to accept what I cannot change,” and finally “the wisdom to know the difference.” If my neighbor's child is dying of cancer, I can help the neighbor even if I can not help the child. Prayer stands as a wedge of hope, an act of courage in the face of fear. Is this a time when there is “wisdom in knowing the difference,” or does that wisdom come later, after the child lives or dies? What is such wisdom, anyway? Can we know the difference while there is still hope?

Strangely, this has a familiar ring. In my last essay I described the peculiar features of an aspect of quantum mechanics called “quantum entanglement.” True, that was about subatomic particles. But the measurements can be done in any physics lab, and these measurements routinely confirm the strangeness of physics: a result – a particular quantum state – is neither known nor knowable until it is measured. And for particles “entangled” in a single quantum system, measuring one particle determines the state of the other particle as well, even if the other particle is distant. It is, to use Einstein's terminology, “spooky action at a distance.”

This conundrum was expressed in terms closer to human experience by Erwin Schrodinger, one of the founders of quantum mechanics. Instead of two subatomic particles, suppose one subatomic particle and a cat. The subatomic particle and the cat are “entangled” by the following artifice: the cat is put inside a box, along with a small vial of radioactive material that has

one chance in two of emitting an electron. If the electron is emitted, this would trigger release of a poison which would kill the cat.

In the original version of “Schrodinger's Cat” the cat can have only two “states” – alive or dead. I'm going to change the story slightly and suppose that there is no poison, and that the two states of the cat are “black cat” and “white cat.” Because this is the quantum world, there is no such thing as a “gray cat,” and the probability is 50-50 that when you open the box the cat will be black or white, depending on whether the “entangled” electron was emitted or not.

The reason physicists puzzle over this example is because they are curious about the state of the cat while the box is closed. The mathematics – which works so well in describing experimental results overall – simply “superimposes” the probabilities, but denies that there can be a “gray cat” or a “speckled cat” or any other kind of combination cat. The superimposed probabilities “collapse” when a measurement is taken, so that only a black cat or a white cat is actually “seen.”

The key idea is that the allowable states are distinct, and there is no “gray” between them. That's the nature of the quantum world, which appears to be our world, the world that is being shared with us by a loving God.

What if this God of ours is an integral part of this quantum world, this one reality? Surely that must be if reality is one. Quantum mechanics is not simply an odd concept tossed into reality just to challenge our comprehension, as if God were somehow outside of reality.

Christians have an understanding of God that seems peculiar to other monotheists. The idea of three distinct persons in one God is not understood by Jews and Muslims, the other people of the Book. And it does seem a rather strange notion, perhaps as strange as quantum entanglement.

There are aspects of faith that we have trouble getting our arms around. And it is easy enough to resolve the struggle with the Trinity by invoking the mystery of a God who is with us, deeply and inextricably. That is the meaning of the Christ, after all, the God who is with us, in the flesh. Indeed, it is Christ with us, in the flesh, that is the reason for the Trinity in the first place.

I'm not sure I want to push the metaphor too far, but what if we have a quantum God? God with us, in the flesh, a presence experienced again at Eucharist, is the same God, yet distinct like a quantum state is distinct. The Spirit is not as earthy, but still very present and distinct. Does "quantum state" work better than "person"? Probably not, at least for me. I can relate to "person," and I have trouble relating to a "quantum state."

But the quantum state does not become particular until its measure is taken. Does faith take God's measure, serving to accept a constant invitation to experience what is real? Combine that with the notion of "distinct" – whether "persons" or "states" – and perhaps "three" and "one" may be understood as the same. This God of ours is all over and through us, in distinct and discrete ways. "Subtle is the Lord," said Einstein. And yet God's presence is palpable. It is said that we are the hands and feet of Christ. That metaphor doesn't quite work with the Spirit, whose guidance we seek, but the distinct presence of the Spirit remains palpable. The intertwining of Christ and the Spirit in the same God takes the edge off an otherwise distant Creator.

We do not know who God is or how God works, but the Trinity may be viewed as an approximation of a reality whose comprehension we can only grasp at.

There is but one reality, and we are blessed to share in it. The Trinity is a glimpse of the encompassing oneness of this reality. That may seem ironic, because our faith cousins in the line of Abraham have on occasion argued that the Trinity bespeaks three Gods, not one. For example, Islam views Christ as contrary to the oneness of God, who has no "associates."

But the oneness of reality has a quite different implication. A loving God is sharing that reality. The sharing is a marvel, because it does not create two realities. The integrity of the one reality is not compromised. God is awesome.

How can we comprehend the oneness of reality and at the same time comprehend one God who is distinct from us? That is the necessary consequence of being independent. The sublime beauty of this oneness – which is an integrated and seamless whole – is difficult for our meager minds to comprehend.

Yet this comprehension is coming into being. Suppose the Trinity was not revealed to us, in a conventional sense. Suppose it is our own, our feeble attempt to grasp the fullness of the reality that includes our sharing in it. The reality is awesome, just awesome.

We are independent. This one and awesome God is doing this without breaking reality. Independent beings we are, able not only to love but to comprehend, even if through a glass and darkly. The work is ongoing, in

process, now but not yet. We are living it. We are part of it. Amazing.

But until Christ, the unity escaped us. We thought of God and God's creation. Our comprehension was two, not one. But that was then. Our comprehension itself is a work in progress, an integral part of cosmic evolution. The consciousness of sentient beings, who *resonate* to the dance of love, is a surprise that we take for granted, a surprise that enables these sentient beings to comprehend the further surprise that is the Christ, with further surprises yet in store, including the end times or *parousia*. Cosmic evolution puts the emphasis upon the surprise. As with Schrodinger's cat, we have not yet opened the box, in the "now, but not yet."

God and a separate creation are divisions of our own construction. We are called to a more sublime unity. We approximate that unity in the Trinity.

This is progress.

Christ is central to this progress. The Risen Christ prompted those who experienced the surprise of the living Christ to create a new paradigm. To have the Spirit "proceed from the Father **and the son**," the so-called "filioque" language that distressed the Orthodox Church, is simply a recognition of the role that Christ has played in our construction of the Trinity.

The Trinity is not given to us. It is our construction. In an important sense, we made it up. It is not simply that God is one, and that the three persons in one God is mystery. Reality – the fullness of reality, outside of which there is nothing – is one. We have mistaken our independence – which is quite real – as a token of a separate creation. Thus have we viewed God and creation as two, a separation unredeemed by a pantheistic approach. Pantheism is not an adequate approximation of the unity of reality.

The Trinity is our first good approximation of the unity of reality. It is not about the unity of God, but about the oneness of reality. The theology of the Trinity has deftly maintained the coherence of this construction. Christ as God incarnate, as Logos prior to creation, avoids the temporality of a mere bodily and therefore subordinate creation by a prior "God the Father".

A loving God is enveloping us. We cannot maintain a distant God. We confuse our independence – real as it is – with distance from God. We are to share, and we are to live in the unity of Christ. Even the construction that "God sent his only Son" is inadequate, reflecting some measure of the "God and creation" duality. God and the Son are one. God and the Spirit are one. Reality is one, and we are blessed to share in it, as independent and comprehending beings.

But the Trinity is just an approximation to unity. It serves well enough, however, to overcome the distance of duality. This loving God is with us, in a very palpable

sense. Prayer life is simply a participation in God's loving presence. Our cup runneth over.

Prayer is a place to be with God. It is a place to come back to for refreshment as we struggle with daily life. The monks have chosen the better part.

Or have they? They are our prayer as we struggle with daily life. Daily life is also integrated into this sharing of reality. Daily life is not a way station, where those who are not in prayer mark time until a passing over. The activities of daily life are the objects of our sharing of God's love. We make investments of love in these activities. There is nothing in daily life that is not an opportunity for such investment.

"Daily life" is perhaps too confining a term. Society and its institutional realities are built up from the activities of daily life, but have lives of their own that are not aptly comprehended by the term "daily." They, too, require investments of love. These investments of love are part of our common journey toward the end times, whatever surprise that turns out to be.

How awesome is God's love for us! God is an integral part of what we do, however and whenever we experience yet another opening of the box, at Eucharist or in sharing small acts of kindness with a stranger.

This is the meaning of the Trinity.

Or one meaning of the Trinity. In *Quest for the Living God*, Elizabeth Johnson has a section about the mystery of the Trinity. She quotes from St. Augustine who, as usual, has an engaging way of putting things: "But still you ask, 'three what?' ... 'Three persons' was coined ... in order that we might not be obliged to remain silent,"¹ to which Johnson responds: "In other words, 'person' is the best of an inadequate lot."²

Upon reading that section it occurred to me that cosmic evolution, and in particular our development as a sentient civilization, provides an opportunity for reflection.

We are not alone in the cosmos. If scientists are cautious about that conclusion – waiting for physical evidence – the eyes of faith are clearer. If a loving God is sharing existence with beings who are independent and able to love one another – if that is the point of creation – then what science tells us about the vastness of this evolving cosmos simply confirms the scope of God's generative powers. There are tens of billions of stars in our own galaxy, and a good many of those have a size and pattern of gravitational formation that produce rocky inner planets and gaseous outer planets like our own solar system. And there are a hundred billion galaxies.

Do the math. God is prolific. This is yet another chapter in the ongoing story of an earthly humanity that is less and less the center of anything. Our ancestors thought the universe revolved around the Earth, and now

it turns out that the universe is expanding, has no center, and that our Sun is just one star out of billions in a galaxy out of billions. And with the prospect of uncountable numbers of sentient civilizations in this vast cosmos, humanity on planet Earth does not retain even a spiritual centrality.

Maybe that's a sign of humanity's maturity, coming to grips with a life story that suggests we take a seat at the foot of God's cosmic table. Humility and maturity go together. Other sentient civilizations may be doing better with their talents, and come more quickly to humility and maturity.

The perspective provided by the prospect of other sentient civilizations in distant galaxies makes prudent the task of rethinking – or, better, re-imagining – how we take our religious tradition. Somehow we must allow for some measure of symmetry, a symmetry that recognizes that God's children are many.

These many children share with humanity that they are loved by God. That others besides humanity on planet Earth are sentient means that they, too, have a consciousness that *resonates* to small acts of kindness. It is this consciousness which is aware of the Spirit, through which *resonance* operates, not as an oracle but gently enabling discernment of which alternatives *resonate* more. The *sensus fidelium* flows out of this process of discernment, and other sentient civilizations will have their own *sensus fidelium*, however differently it may develop and be described. The institutional realities that accompany community are rooted in, and are expressions of, this developing *sensus fidelium*, although that may be a conclusion that is only gradually embraced by those who are fiduciaries for these institutional realities.

Fortunately, the evidence we have of an evolving cosmos suggests that we ought not to be surprised if our own consciousness, graced as it is with the capacity for love, nonetheless grows gradually. We champ at the bit in order to make progress, as we see what *resonates* with us as progress, toward a better world. Other sentient civilizations on other worlds, in response to the same loving God, are tending to their own gardens.

And our own reflections on the other, the stranger in the land, and the stranger in a distant land, can but slowly absorb what this means.

Do other sentient civilizations see God as a Trinity?

There is a story about a corporate executive who had climbed the ladder of success, and when he reached the top and looked around found that he had leaned his ladder up against the wrong wall.

If the Church may be understood in these terms, as having over the millennia constructed a ladder of teachings and is now able to look over what theologian Roger Haight describes as "the postmodern world," the

question is not whether post modernity contains the usual distractions from spiritual discipline, but rather what has been the reason for climbing this ladder in the first place. That's the point of the corporate executive's story.

And if the reason for climbing this ladder of teachings and tradition is to construct a universal religion that is fully endowed in comparison with other religions that are less fully endowed, then it would be reasonable to wonder whether the ladder has been leaned up against the wrong wall.

So why has the Church been climbing this ladder in the first place? If Jesus Christ is given as the reason, would Christ agree that the ladder has been leaned up against the right wall, or is this wall a human construct, prey to the usual follies of human endeavor?

Happily, the existence of at least one other sentient civilization somewhere in the vast cosmos provides a useful foil for testing whether the Church's ladder has been leaned up against the right wall. Clearly, such a civilization cannot know Jesus of Nazareth (or Abraham, for that matter). It is also evident that the Logos cannot be limited to one incarnation in the cosmos. Cosmic evolution suggests a more integral understanding of the Christ event, as flowing out of a seedbed nurtured in a remote corner – and probably in other equally remote corners – of a fecund and pregnant cosmos. It cannot be otherwise without conjuring up the same singular misapprehension that found Earth and humanity at the center of the universe.

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christian story, but even within that story the Logos must be able to come to fruition elsewhere. We should turn to understanding the nature of the seedbed and its nurturing. Mary probably plays a large role, a role for which the virgin birth is but a placeholder, waiting for a more adequate understanding of what an awesome God has wrought in this vast and pregnant cosmos.

There is, I think, a common thread that links an Earth centered universe and the virgin birth. Both are placeholders for truths that *resonate* deeply in the human soul. The Earth centered universe was a fitting expression for the deeply *resonant* sense that we are loved by God. Now that we as a people are further along in years, older and wiser, we can know God's love for us without the placeholder.

It will be the same with the virgin birth, which seemed a fitting attribute for the Mother of the Risen Christ. It may come down to another understanding of God's love for us, a love that is with us, a love that finds expression in a different quantum state of the same loving God, a love that was nurtured by a remarkable woman and mother, without whom Jesus would not have come to be the Risen Christ.

At least I offer that for your consideration. It is an effort to come to grips with the existence of other sentient civilizations elsewhere in the cosmos that are also loved by God.

We may never be able to communicate with another sentient civilization elsewhere in the cosmos. The distances in time and space may be too great. But that does not matter. The perspective provided by such a distant civilization loved by the same God allows a return to planet Earth with a fresh outlook on other civilizations in our own midst.

In the latest issue of *America* magazine (dated October 24, 2011) there is an article about "The Changing Face of Theology." The article notes that today's theologians are lay people rather than primarily clerics. In a section "Context Matters" the author, who has been teaching theology for forty years, comments that the formulation of church teaching changes with changes in the historical, social and cultural context.

That conclusion seems fair enough, but as I read it I wondered whether "context" adequately accounts for another dynamic which is part and parcel of humanity's participation in an evolving cosmos, namely, the evolution of human comprehension itself. The "real" that we can get our arms around is inching toward some further surprise. Theology and physics are not that far apart, really, for they are both about what is real.

The *America* article refers to what we now know about the cosmos and asks, "How do theologians do theology in light of this expanding, exploding knowledge of the cosmos?"

How is change to be rooted? It is in the nature of evolution that some change will take us by surprise. As Lonergan reminds us, change is not a reduction from first principles. Yet how can the prospect of change that may be surprising be integrated into a present understanding of what is real? A cautious answer to a comparable question may have prompted (and may continue to make reasonable) rejection of Jesus as the Christ. Jesus as Christ simply does not *resonate more* for those who find nourishment in another tradition. But then what difference does that make if Jesus is not unique as Christ, a Christ that can also come to fruition in some distant sentient civilization?

Are we in a position to address these questions about what is real without the conventional limitations of either physics or theology?

TO BE CONTINUED.

¹ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book V, section 10.

² Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, p. 212.