



# NOVA notes

NOVA Catholic Community

January 2012

## Chair Notes...

December isn't over as I write this, but I can hardly wait to take the old calendar off the wall. Although there's a colorful photograph, what I see mostly are boxes with red and blue scribbles, phone numbers and notations, asterisks and circles. It's cluttered and busy, and I'm reminded of our Advent reflection: "...one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as a day..."

During those weeks, we contemplated a swirling universe where time isn't measured in 24-hour days, and we talked about this idea of *God who is waiting*. Billions of years before our solar system, even more billions before life began, as Jerry Stockhausen noted. What could God be waiting for now? For us to turn belief into action? For our transformation? For our transformation of the world around us? Or to simply surrender to One who is bound inexplicably to us, to fall into God's loving embrace, as Dan Madigan suggested.

In the meantime, a NOVA group sang Christmas carols at the residences of several of our members, most of whom can no longer attend NOVA liturgies. In addition to preparing meatloaves and scalloped potatoes, we wrapped new warm socks, gloves and hats for the Christ House homeless; and we shopped and traveled and celebrated the holidays with friends and family. But those images and questions of Advent still linger, especially as I prepare to rip the old calendar off the wall and cross the threshold leading to the empty pages of 2012: 365 unused fragments of time – full of possibilities.

Well, yes, full of possibilities, but of course, not really empty. And not just because of the appointments lying in wait. The emptiness is an illusion. We know God lives in us and among us, connecting us to each other and to the universe. So

we journey into the New Year together, re-energized to celebrate the Eucharist and to work for peace and justice.

And as some of you reminded me so thoughtfully, we need to make the journey, do the work, without concern for time, for delays, or whether we will ever see the results.

So let the calendar fill up – make the meat loaves for Christ House, bring cereal for the AFAC pantry and paper goods for the shelter, collect money and blankets and warm clothing for the needy, and volunteer for overnights at St. Clements. And hopefully, we'll continue to deepen our awareness and commitment to the care of our physical environment as well as of our fellow travelers.

Speaking of—here are a few things to note in those empty boxes of your January calendar:

**Sunday, January 8: How do you do Consensus?** discussion led by Mike Timpane after the liturgy; **Saturday, January 14, NOVA premier of "YERT"** ("Your Environmental Roadshow") featuring Mark Dixon, son of former NOVA members Valerie and Greg, and his team with their critically acclaimed film about America's efforts toward environmental sustainability; and **Saturday, January 21, NOVA General Meeting** (See p. 4 for details.). *Anytime soon*, purchase your tickets for the famous "**Men Who Cook Event**," NOVA's April 22 fundraising dinner to benefit our South Sudan Education project. Tickets sold out in advance last year, so don't miss it.

Praying with you for a New Year of peace and justice, and may everyone on earth fall into God's loving embrace! ~**Teddi Ahrens, Co-chair**

For NOVA photos, click on:  
<http://www.novacommunity.weebly.com>

## January 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

- 2 Marie Pinho  
5 Michaela Kane  
Jenny Tuccillo  
11 Catherine Annunziata  
14 Andrew Maussert-Mooney  
15 Glen Passin  
16 Larry Goldschmidt  
23 Kirsten Carroll  
Walt Landry  
28 Phyllis O'Toole  
31 Mike Marron



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

### NOVA is praying for. . .

**Eve Birch** in her work to assist the needy.

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

**Jody Furlong**, who has back pain and would appreciate a phone call or note.

**Margaret Hayes**, who is recovering from knee surgery

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

**Betsy Marron**, who is scheduled for surgery, that it will be successful, and that she will have a speedy recovery.

**Jean Mendez**, who would appreciate a call or note.

**Linda Rosenberg**, who will have surgery, that it will be successful, and that she will have a speedy recovery.

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

**NEWSLETTER DEADLINE  
FOR NEXT ISSUE:  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25**

## Liturgies: Cycle B

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 School (located on Carlin Springs Rd. off Arlington Blvd.) begin at 10:15 a.m.

**January Music Liaison**  
**Barbara Formoso**

**January 8 – Epiphany of the Lord (and NOVA’s 44<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)**

Dan Madigan, S.J.

Planners: Linda Rosenberg, Kathy Scheimer and others

**January 15 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Joe Kenna

Planners: Amy and Charlie Bailey

**January 22 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Quinn Connors, O.Carm.

Planners: Anne Passin, Phyllis and Joe Houck

**January 29 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Jim Noonan, M.A.

Planners: Linda Rosenberg and Kathy Scheimer

**February Music Liaison**  
**Barbara Formoso**

**February 5 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Gerry Stockhausen, S.J.

Planners: Alicia and Phil Cackley

**February 12 – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Joe Nangle, OFM

Planners: Peace and Social Justice Group

**February 19 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Joe Kenna

Planners: Jeanne and Tom Clarkson

**February 26 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent**

Dan Madigan, SJ

Planner: Barbara Formoso

**NOTE:** Celebration of **Ash Wednesday** on **February 22**, will be at **7:30 p.m.** at the home of Marlene Shade and John Tarrant

## From the Christmas 2011 Liturgy

You can see the video of Kelly and Arthur at this year’s Christmas liturgy singing “I Wonder As I Wander” by clicking on the link below:

<http://youtu.be/HfAOc2gYgY8>

Thanks to Dianne Carroll!



Alicia and Jim Hug at Christmas liturgy

## Gunston Volunteers

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, contact Dianne Carroll.

### January Gunston Volunteer Schedule

January 5: **Cathy Goldschmidt, Alicia, Jack, and Cece/Kopp**

January 12: **Tim, Jerry, and Eric**

January 19: **Syd and Glen**

January 26: **Orlando-Kane family**

### **St. Clements Winter Shelter Volunteers**

NOVA volunteers will be participating in the St. Clement Overflow shelter this winter as they have in the past many years. Below is this year's schedule.

January 9: **Kopp Michelotti and Marie Pinho**

January 23: **Ted Miller and Jerry Barrett**

February 6: **Clyde Christofferson and Eric Carroll**

February 20: **Michael Kane and Ray Tarasovic**

March 5: **David Mog and Jason Powell**

Sub. for Jan. 9/Feb. 6: **Joe Annunziata**

Thanks to these volunteers for giving up an entire night to welcome the homeless guests. They are so happy to have a warm quiet place to sleep!

~Dianne Carroll

## NOVA General Meeting

**Date:** Saturday, January 21

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Location:** Barrett's social Room

### Agenda

1. **Follow-up with Jerry and Mike about "Making Consensus"** (anything that may not have been covered in their earlier discussion, questions, etc.)
2. **Start-up: Querying the community about their interest in a discussion of living will, comfort care and health care decisions**  
The focus will be on the "Five Wishes" document (see summary below) following page), which meets the requirements of 36 state statutes. If there's interest, we'll set a date for a presentation and discussion.
3. **Community Care and Outreach**  
Query from Marlene Shade, chair of the committee, about what the community feels is needed

**Please bring snacks to share**

## Five Wishes Summary

### What is it?

Five Wishes is the first living will that talks about your personal, emotional and spiritual needs as well as your medical wishes. It lets you choose the person you want to make health care decisions for you if you are not able to make them for yourself. Five Wishes lets you say exactly how you wish to be treated if you get seriously ill. It was written with the help of The American Bar Association's Commission on the Legal Problems of the Elderly, and the nation's leading experts in end-of-life care. It's also easy to use. All you have to do is check a

box, circle a direction, or write a few sentences. (Taken from the “Aging with Dignity/Five Wishes” pamphlet.) More information available on the website: [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org)

**The Five Wishes include:**

1. The person I want to make care decisions for me when I can't.
2. The kind of medical treatment I want or don't want.
3. How comfortable I want to be.
4. How I want people to treat me.
5. What I want my loved ones to know.

~Submitted by **Teddi Ahren**

**Salt Request**

Join with SALT (Social Action Linking Together), and be an advocate for Social justice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable. Write letters, make phone calls and visit legislators.

**Find Your Virginia Legislators:**

<http://legis.state.va.us/>. Learn how to make a difference. For more information, visit the SALT web site at [www.S-A-L-T.org](http://www.S-A-L-T.org)

~**John Horejsi**

**Social Justice Fund Report**

**2011 Homeless Prevention Rental Assistance Fund**

Nova supports a program to provide rental relief to prevent homelessness on a one-time, emergency basis. This program was invented by NOVA in response to unmet needs in 2007. Social Workers in 6 Arlington Schools can access funds by completing a form that documents the need of the family, agencies that have been accessed for help, and the amount requested. Jennifer Carroll, MSW, developed forms. She receives the forms and determines if it meets criteria and cuts the check to the rental company.

During 2011, 8 families received assistance ranging from \$200- \$1600 for a total of \$6800.00.

Some of the reasons of need were:

- Mother treated for a mental health diagnosis of depression. She was recently hospitalized for a week.
- Mother had rent but not security deposit.
- Father with 4 children. Mother was detained by police due to immigration issues. She voluntarily left the country, spending \$1,300 that was for rent.
- Mother lost her job.
- Mother is undocumented and she works in construction and work is inconsistent.
- Mother babysits and rents the basement of someone's home. She is being helped to get hired full time.
- Father has been incarcerated since this summer and is likely being deported. The bills went unpaid and debt is accumulating because the father was previously in charge of the bills. The mother does not make enough money to cover her mortgage and bills and does not have leftover money to pay for other necessities such as food, clothing, etc. The mother has been working with school social workers to come up with a sustainable plan. Mother is renting out rooms in her home and her eldest daughter will begin working a part-time job so that the family can stay in their home and support the family's other needs. The mother has also been in communication with her DHS social worker to discuss resources. In November, the mother used all of her mortgage money to pay the overdue utilities bills so that they would not be cut-off.

**2011 Family Emergency Fund**

This fund was set up with funds designated for families in Arlington Schools for emergencies when no other funds are available. Referrals come from the school social worker using a similar form to the rental assistance form. Jennifer Carroll oversees the dispersal of these funds. The total for 2011 was about \$1600.

A couple of examples:

- (1) transportation for parent with cancer for treatment
  - (2) diapers for child with traumatic brain injury
- (continued on following page)*

## School Supply and Education Fund

This fund is to address educational issues (e.g. summer school fee, school supplies). A second collection was taken at the end of the summer and \$1200.00 was collected. \$300 was used right away for supplies for children to start school. The fund paid for after care for 2 children. The remaining money will be used during the school year. Arlington County Public School social workers have been made aware of this fund.

Seven of Arlington's schools have been participating in these special funds to help families when the need is not covered by any other source. One social worker wrote, "You know I have been working hard to use other resources. So you know I must really need the help." They are very appreciative of our willingness to help these families who are in dire need of assistance. Thanks to NOVA folks for their continued generosity.

~Dianne Carroll

## **American Catholic Council Update**

*John Hushon\* spoke to the PAX and NOVA IECs on Tuesday, November 22. His remarks follow.*

Thank you to PAX for supporting ACC. Many attended and many participated in the breakout presentations. As we all discovered at ACC, Intentional Eucharistic Communities are one of the "answers" to the institutional issues in our Church today—and having two vibrant, experienced groups of IEC members (PAX and NOVA) added immeasurably to ACC.

In a sense, PAX prepared me to do what I did to bring ACC about. For PAX members already "enjoy" most of the fruits of Vatican II reform that we argue for in ACC. Participation in liturgy, emphasis on justice, community building, sensitivity to inclusiveness in language and practice. The question, asked often within PAX, is how to balance what PAX already has internally with the evangelization imperative of the gospel—to bring this good news of how to do Church to others.

ACC was a success:

- We held over 80 listening sessions in 33 states before ACC—and published Soundings—the

results of those sessions (available on line at [AmericanCatholicCouncil.org](http://AmericanCatholicCouncil.org))

- 1600 (Fri night) -2200 (Sunday) people attended.
- [We had] lots of publicity—thanks to the opposition of the Archdiocese of Detroit—which deliberately mis-stated our intentions and expectations—presumably out of fear, an emotion we in the reform movement are increasingly encountering.
- People enjoyed and were nourished.
- At least 600 new people, unfamiliar with the reform movement attended—we reached new wine for a new wineskin.
- The ACC listserv has grown to 4000
- Many ideas were expressed—and are being catalogued and acted upon.
- We acclaimed and adopted the Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (CBBR, see the website for a download).
- IMWAC invited us to participate with them in a Vatican III, called by the laity, in Rome, September 2014.
- We paid the bills and had a modest amount left over

(Note on the closing liturgy—the presence of the Holy Spirit—as an aged presider's voice failed, the entire congregation "helped" him by speaking the words of the Eucharist.)

## **Post ACC—some practical results and actions:**

- Many took the DVDs and transcripts and are having post-ACC sessions at home, in parishes, in libraries—the movement is growing.
- Many are participating in the ACN discussion boards.
- Lots of requests for materials, resources, particularly about IECs
- Reports to COR and CTA (November 2011)
- Institute for Leadership Training in Non-Violent Resistance
- (suggestion of Caridad Inda, using principles of Gene Sharp and his Einstein Institute, credited with providing the political tools and philosophies of Arab Spring to bring about a Catholic Spring—further announcements about this as we firm up the moderators and formats—but we hope to do it in Spring 2012)

- National Priests Organization (more than 250 clergy identified themselves as such as attendees) their website is: info4@uscatholicpriests.org

### Post ACC—theology—some personal thoughts:

- We Are Church—not just a slogan, the reality of our religious lives.
- Notion of sacramentality. Consider the recently published D’Antonio studies and the Pew studies from last year: Catholics view access to sacraments as one of the top 4 aspects of being Catholic—and Catholics hold an “expanded notion of sacrament” (not just Eucharist and Baptism as is the case in most Protestant faiths). This expanded notion “sacramentalizes” all of the important transition events of human lives—again emphasizing the “human-ness” of sacrament.
- (For those curious, the other three D’Antonio characteristics are belief in the physical resurrection, social justice/helping the poor in the footsteps of Jesus, devotion to Mary)

Does this mean Catholics are “hostage” to a church hierarchy which purports to define (narrowly) who can do sacraments/Eucharist and who may receive? How does that square with the Gospels—and the authentic Pauline letters?

OR

As Teilhard de Chardin suggests, are **we** the sacraments, the deliverers and the receivers in our community. (Sacraments are “signs” of personal realities and the reaching out of each person to the divine; thus, the focus should be on persons, the personal encounter, personal transformation, rather than on “things”, “magic words” or “magic motions done by particular individuals.” Vat II moved in this direction—a direction which is being reversed by the hierarchy. IECs come closer to this notion of sacramentality—and they are spreading throughout the world. (Dutch Dominicans and recently the Austrian Priest Coalition have advocated this theology of sacrament.)

How you respond to this idea of sacramentality to some extent determines your openness to ministry: communities led by “former” priests who married? Communities led by women who were validly ordained, but instantly self-excommunicated upon

ordination? Communities without regular access to ordained canonical priests (almost 1/3 of parishes in the US by 2020 according to FutureChurch statistics).

Will we do liturgy without Eucharist—or use “saved” Eucharist—or will we expand the notion of what it means to do a Eucharistic liturgy?

The most extreme hierarchical re-affirmation of the old view requires the termination of any act, prayer, word that implies movement toward the new view: rigid seminary education and admission standards (which require loyalty oaths to the Vatican and the local Ordinary in all matters), removal of inclusive language, prohibition of even the discussion of opening up ordination, rejection of the right of a community to call its leaders, prohibition of girls and women in the sanctuary, restriction of extraordinary ministers of communion etc. In essence, the current Vatican thinking is: prohibit anything which brings the people of God closer to doing the things which only an ordained priest, sanctioned by Rome can do—and thus seek to reassert control of the people.

It seems to be that IECs say no to most of this—and certainly the proclamation of the CBRR provides an affirmation of inclusive, participative Church.

Some have suggested that this enculturated belief in Eucharist—appointed, ordained, exclusive “do-er” and “in the state of grace” receiver is one of the principle pillars of hierarchical authority in the Church. More than money. And the hierarchy recognizes this—as they pray, so shall they believe.

**Note:** These remarks were edited by Paula Hillery (PAX Newsletter Editor) and were published in a PAX newsletter. Paula received permission from John Hushon to edit his remarks to make them more readable for anyone who didn’t attend the ACC gathering in Detroit last June. **Thanks to Paula for sharing her work.**

\* John Hushon is a retired international attorney and energy industry executive. He has degrees in international relations (Brown), law (Harvard) and theology (Washington Theological Union); he is a national trustee of VOTF, co-chair of *American Catholic Council* and active in various local and international social justice organizations; he teaches at the Renaissance Academy of Florida Gulf Coast University.

~JC

## Letters



**Photo - a winter/Christmas**

**Scene on a home visit with sister Joan/Bob O'Neil and family, now 10 years ago. The carving - an African wood-setting of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt.**

Dear Family and Friends,

*Usually I try to write these few lines in advance of Christmas -- before email and internet, well a Christmas letter would be crafted by end of November with hope of finding a courier to post in Europe/ North America. This year, well it is afternoon of Christmas Day ... this morning celebrated the "Dawn Mass" with community of about 300 Sudanese -- a joyful gathering, as we sang "Happy Birthday, Jesus" and reflected on our God of Surprises, who ever enters into our histories in surprising and unexpected ways.*

*Last year, Christmas was celebrated with a measure of exhilaration and expectancy – the Referendum on Independence for South Sudan was set for 9 January. With the vote nearly universal in favor, South Sudan separated from the North and became Independent on 9 July – the excitement continues, even as it is clear that building a nation requires much dedication and commitment. And the coming New Year carries many anxieties – hard line northerners continue to oppose southern Independence and unleashed military activities in many border areas. Yes, it partly is over oil and sharing of resources, but dictatorial leaders backed by a fundamentalist Islamic ideology do not accept the loss of control over the largely Christian and black African communities in the South. The "Arab Spring" is alive across Africa ... dictatorial leaders and supporters give up power reluctantly. International pressure is critical if we are to avoid a return to open war.*

*This is the context and background of South Sudan today. On a positive note, the Catholic University of South Sudan is in its fourth year with more than 500 students. May 12 is provisionally set for graduation of the pioneer students—mark the date and come join us for this signal event! In Juba, some 400 students study in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; in Wau, 350 miles to the northwest, 120 students are enrolled in the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Yes, the Baby is born and continues to grow, if steps often appear uncertain and faltering. We slowly are recognized in Sudan and beyond – Virginia Tech/Virginia St. U. partner with Univ. of Juba/CUofSS) in a program funded by USAID to rebuild higher education in South Sudan w focus on Food Security. Gonzaga Univ. teams with CUofSS in designing/engineering a building program that soon begins. Yet there are many needs ... students pay fees of less than \$650/year, beyond the reach of many. If any of you can support our efforts, we will be most grateful. You may send a check payable to "Jesuit International Missions" and mail Jesuit International Missions, 2050 N. Clark Street -- Chicago, IL 60614 (on the memo portion of the check or attached note, indicate the gift is designated to CUofSS--JMI will acknowledge and receipt). And send me a note, so I can thank you and follow... lest it get lost in cyber-space! Oh you might Google **Catholic Univ. of South Sudan ... yes, many articles .. and some are interesting!***

*Let me get this along to you, with many Blessings for you and yours, these days of Christmas and the New Year.*

*Fr. Mike Schultheis, SJ Vice-Chancellor, CUofSS.*



**ECHO, Inc.**  
Ecumenical Community Helping Others  
7205 Old Keene Mill Road  
Springfield, VA 22150-3527  
Phone: (703) 569-9160  
Fax: (703) 455-2763  
[www.echo-inc.org](http://www.echo-inc.org)  
e-mail: [echoadmin@verizon.net](mailto:echoadmin@verizon.net)



United Way  
of the National Capital Area

#8426



#74224



County of Fairfax

NOVA Catholic Community  
c/o Peggy Becker  
7321 Monticello Boulevard  
Springfield, VA 22150

December 15, 2011

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your incredible \$1,150 donation that we received last month to help the Commerce Street fire victims. Seventy-six people in eleven apartments were affected by this overwhelming situation. Your gift helped ECHO to assist those families and was greatly appreciated by all of us.

ECHO gives emergency assistance to people in the Springfield/Burke area. Last year we served over 1,400 families with more than 4,600 family members providing clothing, household items, food, counseling, and financial aid. This fall we filled over 1,000 backpacks for students to have a successful beginning of the new school year. We also distribute Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets and have our Holiday Shop where parents select gifts for their children. We function entirely with over four hundred volunteers and fantastic neighbors, like you, who reach out in countless ways to share in our effort.

We are most grateful to the NOVA Catholic Community for your thoughtful generosity, especially now when these families suddenly found themselves in such extreme circumstances. Thank you for your contact information and other offers and particularly for helping others in this community through ECHO.

Sincerely,

Robert F Diegelman, President

## Theology for a Small Planet

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2012

Prior Essays

### An Incarnational God, and the *Sensus Fidelium*

It is the season of the Incarnation, and that is where this essay is going. But I begin with two snippets from ordinary experience, a phone call with my mother and an article from a recent issue of *National Catholic Reporter*. The title contained the words "big history," and the article was about a course now being taught to all freshmen at the Dominican University of California.

One of my favorite Teaching Company courses is titled "Big History," which is why I was attracted to this article. The course has been in development at Dominican for some time, going back to a class offered in the 1990s based on the work of David Christian, who coined the phrase "big history". Christian is somewhat apologetic about the title in his Teaching Company course, but the title seems appropriate enough for a course that begins with the Big Bang and ends with projections several thousand years into our future.

If the basic course has been taught for more than ten years, what is new about the current offering? First, the new course reflects a basic change in focus from the required freshman course in Western or world history. Second, the course includes a sophomore follow-up component in social and environmental justice – the students watch Brian Swimme's "Journey of the Universe" film, which those of us at the Shrine Mont retreat this past September will remember.

Third, the course objectives draw upon the hope that these concepts will encourage humans to reinvent themselves. The *NCR* article quotes one of the professors involved in the project: "***If big history undermines our former sense of God, but we find ourselves unable to abandon our deepest intuitions of spiritual presence, then how shall we understand those intuitions in light of the deliverances of big history?***"

My mother turned 89 in October. She is the only person I know has read all of these "Theology for a Small Planet" articles. Mothers are kindly in this way. She called on the feast of Christ the King to share her recollection that it was on this Sunday more than fifty years ago that my brother and I went to Mass for the first time. Then the conversation turned to a point in one of my articles. There were lots of other sentient civilizations out there, I thought. The stuff from which life emerges is spread too uniformly throughout the cosmos for it to be otherwise. But my mother was not persuaded. She understood my use of a hypothetical

"other" sentient civilization to provide perspective on our own Earthly circumstances, but she thought it still possible that God did this creation thing once, here.

I had my mother in mind when I read the above *quote* from the *NCR* article. My mother's "***deepest intuitions of spiritual presence***" led to her becoming a Catholic in the first place. These intuitions remain strong. I would go further than that. These are not mere intuitions. They are as fundamental as existence itself, reflecting a loving God who is sharing existence with independent beings able to love one another and thereby image God. These "intuitions" are so fundamental to a living and pregnant cosmos – so my argument to my mother went – that God had no need for a more obvious form of intervention to create humanity on Earth (or other sentient civilizations elsewhere).

What about Jesus the Christ? What about the Incarnation? For me, the pregnant cosmos works for Christ as well. If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound if no one is there to hear it? The point of the question is to distinguish between physics and human perception. These "***deepest intuitions of spiritual presence***" make it possible to hear – to perceive – Jesus as the Christ.

And just as these intuitions – which in earlier essays I have associated with the term *resonance* – represent something new borne out of this pregnant cosmos, so Jesus is something newer still, but also borne out this pregnant cosmos.

I think I lost my mother at this point. She followed my insistence that the Incarnation is of the same Logos, whether here as Jesus or elsewhere in some other form. But the distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and a Logos "pre-existent from all eternity" is not something "***our former sense of God***" has ever had to deal with. The possibility of other sentient civilizations elsewhere in the cosmos and also loved by God leads me to questions about the uniqueness of this man we call Christ.

I have a sense that my mother is not yet ready for those questions. And, quite frankly, since we don't yet have physical evidence of intelligent life elsewhere, there is no need to ask the question. My mother is off the hook. She will have better knowledge soon enough, and will be delighted with whatever she finds.

Why do we have these questions, anyway? Why didn't Aristotle have these questions? Aristotle had no idea about "big history", although the evidence passed through his hands as it passes through ours. Quite literally. The cosmic background radiation has always been with us, but it made no sound that we had the presence of mind or technology to listen to. Until 1964.

There is a connection between the cosmic background and *resonance*. I have used the term *resonance* throughout these essays, often in connection with judgments that we make: one alternative may *resonate more* than another, and "***our deepest intuitions of spiritual presence***" calls us to choose the alternative that *resonates more*. The term *resonance* is more economical than "our deepest intuitions of spiritual presence," so I will continue to use it in this essay.

The connection is by way of analogy. First, the analogy. The cosmic background radiation is our evidence of the Big Bang. It's the evidence that settled the question whether the cosmos was eternal or whether it came into existence at some point in time and space. How did we know where to look for this evidence? In some sense, the evidence has been hiding in plain sight for a very long time.

But this is the analogy. Second, the connection. It is my contention that *resonance* – that sense of spiritual presence within each of us – is our evidence for God in the same way that the cosmic background radiation is our evidence for the Big Bang. I believe it is *resonance* – which is accessible to each of us, and to sentient beings elsewhere in the cosmos – rather than some more clearly articulated form of *revelation* that enables us to know, love and serve God and one another. I would carry this one step further and suggest that it is *resonance* – through the simple process of choosing alternatives that are *more resonant* – that provides the community with a "sense of the faithful" (the *sensus fidelium*) for what is handed down by the Church as *revelation*.

In this sense – I would argue – the *sensus fidelium* is primary, and there is no need for a separate revelation from on high. The process can certainly begin with a new thought or understanding that *resonates* with an individual, who may be articulate enough that *resonance* spreads through the community. The *imprimatur* is ultimately provided by the community in the form of the *sensus fidelium*. This process is not inconsistent with human safeguards to the integrity and coherence of the broader community while a *sensus fidelium* is developing, but the very gradualness of the process – dependent as it is upon how well our limited

human minds are able to frame alternatives for *resonance* to evaluate – is of a piece with an evolutionary understanding of the cosmos.

The early followers of Jesus had the benefit of their own *resonance* in evaluating the alternative understandings of the Risen Christ that blossomed in the first centuries after the Crucifixion. Over time this young movement coalesced around a "sense of the faithful" in support of what we now hold as Catholic doctrine.

But let me return to my mother, and to her sensitivity to the uniqueness of Christ. She has a perspective acquired after long years of experience that *resonates* with the belief that the Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth is unique, period. She is not alone, for the current "sense of the faithful" is of the same mind. For my own part, it is compelling to me to suppose that a loving God – our loving and immanent God – could be not only loving but also immanent to other sentient civilizations in the cosmos. It is compelling to me that this loving and awesome God has so arranged the cosmos that other sentient civilizations besides our own could experience the Incarnate and living Christ, by whatever circumstances and under whatever name. Personally, this understanding of God's gracious indwelling across the cosmos *resonates more* than a single Incarnation that can only be known by distant sentient beings if communicated by us. But my mother's own *resonance* gives the nod to what the Church has always understood. I understand that as well.

For myself, however, I am prepared to push the envelope a little further. Consider it a thought experiment. Suppose there are other sentient civilizations elsewhere in the cosmos. And by "sentient" I mean those who also have "deep intuitions of spiritual presence." In that case, it makes no sense to me to suppose that God's immanence – God with us, incarnate in our flesh – depends upon a separate act of divine intervention, independent of the pregnant cosmos. It makes no sense to have a system of belief that, on the one hand, asserts that God is all powerful and, on the other hand, finds contradiction in God being Incarnate in more than one sentient civilization. Surely we don't want to maintain yet another in a long line of failed assumptions that the universe revolves around us.

Who knows whether and when human beings on planet Earth will find evidence of intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos. But that is not what is at issue. The *sensus fidelium* changes slowly. Why so slowly? And how does it change, anyway? The process of *resonance* provides a mechanism for

understanding how and why the *sensus fidelium* changes slowly. An individual is only able to make a judgment between alternatives if the alternatives make sense. If it takes a paradigm shift for a new alternative to make sense, then we are just going to have to wait. Even science has to deal with paradigm shifts, why not religion? If science took decades to transition from classical physics to relativity and quantum mechanics, it should not surprise us if a paradigm shift in our understanding of the Incarnation also takes decades, or longer.

With regard to the Incarnation, Gerry Stockhausen's Advent homily provided a predicate for seeing the Incarnation of Jesus in a different light. Gerry spoke about Mary, and Mary's "yes" to God's offer to have an abode within her, and led from that to the Eucharist and God's offer to have an abode within each of us.

The relevant quote from Gerry's homily is as follows:

*"That tradition carries on, and God would like to do the same to us, and continually invites and says, 'I would like to take flesh in you.' And we find that most explicitly in the Eucharist when we gather and actually receive the body and blood of Jesus. And God invites us to ponder that same mystery, place of wonder that Mary is left with. Do you believe God actually wants to take on your human flesh and blood? Be inside you, find a dwelling place within you, and out of that bring forth life for God's people?"*

*"And we celebrate the mystery, when we gather around this table, that has often been called transubstantiation. And the mystery is, on the one hand, that bread and wine can become the body and blood of Jesus. The mystery, on the other hand, is that the real transformation is not what happens up here [gesturing to the altar] but what happens here [gesturing to those gathered], that we are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. That, of course, is not once for all. That is over and over. And God keeps waiting for that to reach fullness, which we know is never going to happen in this life. But God is waiting to welcome us into that life where there is fullness, and where we are caught up fully into the dwelling place that is God."*

*"It is that we long for; it is that we live for, that that we try to bring forth life in others, to make [the living God] more present."*

The early followers who wrote the Gospels, and the early Church fathers who met in council to discern the meaning of faith in the Risen Christ, did not have the benefit of what we now know about the cosmos.

For them it made perfect sense to conceive of a God who could certainly intervene directly in an unruly world. They didn't know enough to see pregnancy in the cosmos itself. Their alternative – direct intervention to set things straight – is the most *resonant* they could come up with. "God sent his only son" certainly suggests that kind of intervention. And it has the advantage of being clear and straightforward.

The early Church preserved a sense of mystery. Jesus was fully God and fully human. The early Church considered and rejected the notion that Jesus was God in a "human suit," a divine Spirit separate from the human body of Jesus and immune from the suffering of Jesus. What, then, does it mean for Mary to be "overshadowed" by the Spirit? If Jesus the man -- fully God and fully human -- suffered, died and rose again, surely Jesus born of Mary experienced the human sufferings of childhood and adolescence, and growth to maturity, as an integrated whole.

When was Mary "overshadowed"? For those comfortable with a *deus ex machina* God, Jesus became God at conception. For the ancients, this was God as father in a literal sense. As understood in ancient times, a mother's womb was a place of nurture, but the seed is provided by the male. They knew nothing of DNA and X and Y chromosomes.

Does what we now know about the cosmos allow us the freedom to have a more integrated sense of the possibilities of an evolving creation? We are the product of that evolution. If God has taken time with us, why not with Jesus? In that event, Mary's being "overshadowed" by God need not have been accomplished at conception, leaving a complete God/man at birth. A complete God/man at birth would portray baby Jesus as God in a human suit. What we now know makes us free to see Jesus becoming Christ not as an event manhandled by God but something rather more awesome, the outpouring of God's pregnant cosmos. Mary's "yes" – the time of her being "overshadowed" – is not only free but effective over time, the same human time God takes for each of us to come to know who we are.

Who knew? It is said that Mary treasured these things in her heart. Surely so. The Risen Christ and the early Christian communities give witness that Jesus came to know who he was in the fullest sense, and Mary not only came to know this but incubated this fullness until the end. Truly, Mary was *theotokos*, the mother of God. The example of her "yes" beckons each of us, as we are reminded at every Eucharist, to allow the living God to take on our flesh and blood, as Gerry so eloquently said in his homily.

A cosmic paradigm does more than preserve the mystery of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human. It provides an understanding of this awesome and incarnate God that is both personal and prolific. God is so personal and intimate to us that we say "our God" as if God possesses us in our flesh and blood. The Eucharist is the sacrament of that possession. Yet this incarnational God is an expansive presence in and through a vast cosmos, present to the distant "other" in the same personal and possessive way, waiting only for "yes."

Can it be doubted that elsewhere in this vast cosmos the slow measure of God's time is marking out the freedom of other sentient beings able to say "yes" as Mary said "yes"? From this pregnant cosmos has emerged one surprise after another. Human consciousness, able to *resonate* with the small kindnesses of everyday life, is itself a surprise, not predictable from the biochemistry of animal life on planet earth. Jesus the Christ is a further surprise, and the fullness of his possession in and through God is a reality that *resonance* enables us to recognize. And who is to say that the surprises are at an end? If past is prologue, this loving God of ours has many children and incarnations elsewhere, born of the same pregnant cosmos. It is not our God but the God of all, and incarnation is the nature of his being.

The incarnational nature of God's very being somehow seems closer and more vibrant in light of the "big history" which marks the unfolding of a pregnant cosmos. Yet it is a struggle to come to that kind of understanding of the Incarnation. It is not only a struggle for my mother, but a struggle for the institutional Church.

A particular line in the translation of the New Missal makes the point. Before communion we say, "I am not worthy to receive you." But the more exact translation from the Latin is, "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." Note the change in subject. In the simpler translation it is the same person that is both unworthy and yet receives, implicitly saying "yes." The newly approved translation goes back to the pre-Vatican II Latin (which is literally translated as "enter under my roof") and complicates the sentence by making explicit that God is the actor. Our active reception, our "yes," is pushed to the background. It is a return to a *deus ex machina* motif, and away from a more incarnational vision of a God whose presence is so integral to our own being that a simple reception, a "yes," is sufficient. Somehow, a God that must "enter under my roof" is more distant and less incarnational.

It is a wooden Incarnation, rather than real flesh of the living Christ.

But all is not lost. Far from it. A cosmic perspective shows an Incarnation that is proceeding in good time. The full meaning of the Incarnation is "now, but not yet." The *sensus fidelium* may develop its own "yes" in God's time rather than our time. An evolving cosmos makes sense of this – we are coming into a fullness of being that is still beyond our grasp. And yet it is our nature to grasp as it is God's nature to share existence intimately with us. Unity is a work in progress.

And the cosmic perspective provides another insight that is worth noting. All that I have said is from the perspective of a Catholic on planet Earth. How would this incarnational God be expressed elsewhere in the cosmos, by sentient beings who are too distant in space and time to know of the suffering and death of the historical Jesus of Nazareth? We do not know what their story is, or when or whether they have experienced or will experience the surprise of an Incarnation.

But that very prospect provides a different lens for looking at the other cultures on our own planet Earth and, indeed, for looking upon our own Catholic culture from the perspective of the distant and sentient "other." There is a symmetry here that must be found before it can be broken and then transformed by yet another surprise from this unfolding cosmos.

TO BE CONTINUED



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