



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Where Are We?

by Maurice Lange, OMI

Often the first question asked by a group of folks who are lost is "Where are we?" Indeed, this query cuts to the heart of the matter. It is the first and primary step towards re-orienting a sense of place and direction. Kentucky poet, philosopher and farmer Wendell Berry has said that *"you can't know who you are, until you know where you are."*

Well, where are we? This can be responded to in a variety of ways. (Don't be in a rush to read this!) As we know, we are on the planet called Earth. Earth is in a system of 9 planets that go around the Sun. Our planet is 8 light-minutes away from the Sun (or 93 million miles). The Sun is part of 200 billion other stars that make up the Milky Way Galaxy. The latest deep-space photographs from the Hubble Space telescope reveal that there are over a trillion galaxies in the Universe. Most of these trillion galaxies have over 100 billion stars. And the Universe, which we now know is expanding, is 13 billion light years across.

Some folks are turned off by numbers. Others are moved to awe. Where we are is enough to make one's head spin!

Where are we? It's tough to really say...because, in fact, we are always moving. (I am not just speaking of our cultural abhorrence to stillness.) The Earth turns on its axis while at the same time rotating around the Sun. Our solar system revolves around the Milky Way and this galaxy moves with others in the expanding Universe. 4 movements at once! We are anything but still!

Cultural historian Fr. Thomas Berry and others¹ are helping us to see another facet of where we are. Using a very broad lens we see, conservatively, that species are going extinct at the rate of 30 per day! Reading these

signs of our time Berry sees that where we are is not just at the end of summer, nor only at the end of some "favored nation status," nor merely have we recently ended a millennium. **Where we are is at the end of a 65 million year era of Earth history!**

There have been several major periods in Earth's story. Since the extinction of the dinosaurs, the last 65 million years (called the *Cenozoic Era*) have brought

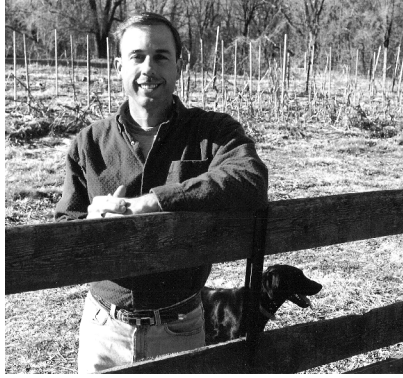
forth the greatest florescence of life and color the planet has ever known. Oh, the diversity and abundance of species that have come into existence! So many of these life forms flourished, grew in harmony with the rest of the ecosystem and were able to adapt to changing conditions. Some did not and went extinct. But in this Cenozoic era the abundance of life brought forth has been such that Berry calls this period the "lyric phase" of the Earth's story. And now this era is at its termination.

If where we are is at the end of the Cenozoic, we might pause on our journey and asked how we got here. Of course, humans came forth within the Cenozoic. Around 2 million years ago, amidst all the richness of the time, our species entered the community of life. At first we humans were a pretty unimpressive group. But with the advent of the ability to create fire, the dawn of agriculture, the rise of the city-state, the birth of great religions, persistent warfare, and the industrial revolution, humans now find themselves at a time and in a place where we now control and effect change on a planetary scale. The myriad number of species (which over millenia evolved within the natural order of things) cannot continue to evolve naturally because of the effect



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Letter from the Director



Welcome again to "La Vista Visions!" And here we are at the beginning of the season of Autumn! While the colors have yet to hit their stride, it's only a matter of days. As the trees turn and give us their beauty before

letting go, we ponder our own call to be generous, life-giving, reciprocal and non-possessive.

In this Autumn issue we are blessed to encounter a veritable harvest-basket brimming over with articles sure to broaden our perceptions. Kelly Nemeck, OMI graciously accepted an invitation to write the reflection (relating to Oblate Constitution #7) that deals with "who Christ is." Jim Brobst, OMI is back and assists us with the relationship that the liturgical calendar has with the natural world. And the lead article serves to help us reorient ourselves during this critical place in Earth's story. We invite you to take time with these articles and allow them to inform, nourish, challenge and assist you in finding your place in the Universe.

In addition to this quarterly newsletter, the Oblate Ecological Initiative has been active in a variety of ways. The *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* is winding up its first season and has it ever been a success! Sixty-six families have had a direct conscious link to the Earth by being nourished from this land. The weather has

Autumn Equinox, 2003

been mostly favorable and the harvests of vegetables, herbs and flowers have been abundant.

Also successful was this August's Earth Literacy Program "*Exploring the Sacred Universe*." A total of 17 people journeyed together in this week long process dedicated to being mutually enhancing with the Earth. This group pondered the Universe Story, justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and bioregionalism. These days centered around an exploration of meaningful questions of our origin. A reconnection with the Divine through immersion into the unfolding Universe was facilitated. Five Oblates were part of the group including scholastic Hipolito Olea, Bob Aaron, Norm Comtois, Seamus Finn and myself.

Many groups have been asking for programs and input from this ministry. These include the Oblate novices, Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows and it's Apartment Community, Mercy Earth Harmony Network, St. Elizabeth faculty, students and faculty from Oblate School of Theology, Ministry to Ministers, Oblate Missions, *Instituto Formacion Pastoral* and Oblate House of Theology.

We do appreciate all the support our readers have given. We wish you a pleasant Autumn season!

-Maurice Lange, OMI

The Oblate Ecological Initiative is a ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Ecological Resources for Parishes and Other Settings

Small Group Discussion Series:

"Our Origin Story - Foundations for Ecological Responsibility" 1999, RENEW International 1-800-325-9521
\$2.25 per discussion booklet

Parish Resource Kits:

"Peace with God the Creator; Peace with All Creation"
"Renewing the Face of the Earth: A Resource for Parishes"
United States Catholic Conference 1-800-235-8722

Pastoral Statements:

"The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" - Pope John Paul II
"Renewing the Earth" - United States Bishops
United States Catholic Conference 1-800-235-8722

Parish Mission:

"Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory" - Parish mission preached by Darrell Rupiper, OMI.
drupiper@hotmail.com



-Marion Honors, CSJ

The Cosmic Christ: New Age or New Testament?

by Francis Kelly Nemeck, OMI



For nearly thirty years, Francis Kelly Nemeck, OMI has been director of Lebh Shomea, a contemplative - eremetical House of Prayer in the South Texas desert. He has authored and co-authored several books, including "Called by God: A Theology of Vocation and Lifelong Commitment."

The February 21, 2003, issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* carried a cover story and center spread on the Vatican's latest communiqué regarding its understanding of "New Age" spirituality. Even though the articles in that issue of NCR did not highlight the Cosmic Christ, the cover piece bore the title "Cosmic caveats." Many young and middle-aged people associate the word "cosmic," when used in relation to spirituality, with New Age beliefs or practices. An older generation of thinkers, however, tends to associate the theological usage of "cosmic" with Père Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (1881-1955). In reality, the term "cosmic" is at least as old as the Septuagint version of the Book of Genesis, and the term "cosmic" as applied to Christ is at least as old as the New Testament.

Yes, Teilhard does use the phrase the "Cosmic Christ" with some frequency. In many respects, he popularized the phrase. Teilhard uses also other biblically-based expressions, such as the Universal Christ and the Christ Omega, in fundamentally the same sense as the Cosmic Christ. Each of these expressions has several New Testament reference points.

John 3:16 is an insightful passage relating to the Cosmic Christ. "God so loved the world that God sent the only Son." The word that we translate "world" is none other than *kósmos*. No doubt, the human author of this passage and the initial readers of the Fourth Gospel thought of cosmos in terms of the primitive cosmogony of the Hebrews; that is, the inverted fishbowl model and the Priestly account of the seven days of creation. No doubt, also, the divine author of the passage had a galactic understanding of *kósmos*. (See John 1:3; Eph 1:9-10; 1:23; Phil 2:10-11; 3:20-21; Col 1:16-17 & 20.)

Colossians 3:11 is forceful in its brevity and clarity: "Christ is all and is in all." Behold the Universal Christ: *pánta kai en pasín Christós*. (See 1 Cor 8:6; 15:28.) The Greek expression is emphatic and unequivocally inclusive. "All" means quite literally everything: each creature in the universe, the entirety of creation from beginning to end.

The concluding chapter of the Book of Revelation puts the following words specifically on the lips of Christ: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22:13). Christ Omega is for all time. (See Rev 1:8; 21:6.)

We usually think of the Passover of the Lord as the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet, in a broader sense the phrase "Passover of the Lord" stretches from the incarnation of Jesus in the womb of Mary to the Ascension. In its most comprehensive sense, however, the Passover of Christ extends from the creation of all things in him and through him and for him and by him to the recapitulation of all things in him at the Parousia; that is, at the Pleroma or Fullness of Christ. All creation comes forth from the Father and is returning to the Father in Christ. Jesus existed historically at a specific time and in a particular place. And Jesus is most certainly the Christ. Yet, as the reality of Christ transcended all notions of Messiah current at Jesus' time, so also does the reality of Christ transcend the limitations of Jesus' humanity. While the Jesus of history is the Christ of faith, the Christ of faith remains more than the Jesus of history. There is an aspect of the mystery of Christ that is coextensive with the entirety of creation, because Christ is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Moreover, Christ is not only the Alpha and the Omega, but also the dynamic force underlying everything in between — the entire evolutionary process: "Christ holds all things in unity" (Col 1:17). In contemporary language, the evolving universe — that is, the galactic expanse, the planet earth, the realm of the living, the sphere of the human — are all imbued with Christ from beginning to end. Or, to use Teilhard's terms: Cosmogenesis, Geogenesis, Biogenesis and Anthropogenesis, from a Christian perspective, are all but successive and interrelated facets of Christogenesis, of the Cosmic Christ.

Teilhard distinguishes "genesis" from "evolution." At least theoretically, evolution can be in any direction.

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Moreover, if left to itself, evolution could stagnate or even conceivably self-destruct by closing in upon itself. Genesis, on the other hand, is evolution directed toward its ultimate point of consummation. From a Christian perspective, it is Christ who from within the creative process initiates, sustains and brings all creation to its Christocentric fulfillment. The ultimate point of consummation is — to use the words of Ephesians 1:10 — “the recapitulation of all things in Christ, everything in the heavens and everything on earth.” That Christ-directed process is the core meaning of the term Christogenesis. Thus, creation is not an action that occurred way-back-when, but an ongoing process that is still heading toward completion. Evolution is God’s way of creating. Time is the matrix in which God acts, creates, transforms. Because of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, everything is capable of becoming sacred.

Matter is the ensemble of things, energies, creatures that surround us and are within us, constituting our observable selves and our world. Matter is the common, universal, tangible milieu infinitely varied and shifting within which we exist and grow. Matter can at times be a burden and at times a source of nourishment. Matter is everything in us and all around us that is becoming what God destines it to be. Matter is the matrix of Spirit. Matter is becoming Spirit. God is at the heart of Matter transforming Matter in Spirit. Because of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Spirit is that which Matter is becoming. Thus, Matter and Spirit are not two separate things, but rather two states or aspects of the same cosmic stuff evolving toward what God intends it to become under the influence of the Cosmic Christ, under the transforming impetus of Christogenesis.

The historical Jesus is utterly essential to an understanding of the Cosmic Christ. The Word became flesh in the most physiological sense of the term. Like the molecules that make up our bodies, the molecules that constituted the physical body of Jesus also go back to the Big Bang. The God-become-human is in solidarity not only with the whole human race, but also with the entire cosmos. In God’s infinite wisdom, the eternal Word entered creation at creation’s inception so as to become incarnate in the

fullness of time. Thus, the Word chose to become creature not only 2000 years ago, but also the Word mysteriously entered the original matter out of which came the Big Bang and the universe as we have come to understand it. The humanity of Jesus did not come down from on high, as it were, or just appear out of nothing. The humanity of Jesus came forth from within the Christogenesis process itself, because God so willed it.

Cosmic evolution, geo-evolution, bio-evolution and human evolution are in reality cosmogenesis, geogenesis, biogenesis, anthropogenesis. That is, because of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no need to try to distinguish “natural” from “supernatural.” Everything is in Christogenesis. Everything is

Christ-imbued. Because Christ is truly cosmic, everything is sacred, if not immediately, at least ultimately. Applying these principles to all that we do and to all that we undergo, Teilhard puts it this way: In everything we suffer, we suffer Christ suffering. Whatever we do, Christ is done. Moreover, we might add in relation to joy: In everything we rightfully enjoy, Christ enjoys and is enjoyed.

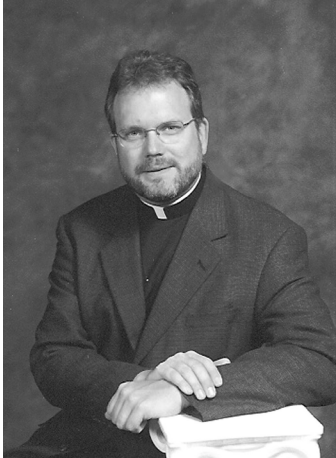
Christogenesis brings a renewed perspective to the mystery of suffering and of the Cross. Many people

view suffering as first and foremost a punishment, an expiation. The effectiveness of suffering derives from the degree of sacrifice entailed. That is, the more it hurts, the more efficacious it must be. Suffering is born of sin and makes reparation for sin. In this view, it is good to suffer in order to master, to conquer, to free oneself. Jesus on the Cross is the ultimate symbol of reparation. The view urged by life in the Cosmic Christ, however, places the accent elsewhere: Suffering is first and foremost integral to the work of development. Suffering is, so to speak, the price that has to be paid in moving and in being moved forward. Suffering arises from the tremendous effort that the evolutionary process requires. As forms of suffering, sin, pain and death are integral to the process of becoming, for every living creature commits its faults, struggles to exist and grow, and eventually dies. In the context of life in the Cosmic Christ, Jesus on the Cross is the ultimate symbol of the arduous labor of evolution, of Christogenesis. ☯



Cosmic Time, Sacred Time

by Jim Brobst, OMI



It seems we keep getting more and more obsessed with time. I suspect it's because our world keeps moving faster and faster, we get busier and busier, and we often feel as though there's less time than there used to be.

We would be wrong to think that only modern folks are concerned about time. The ancient Aztecs and other

cultures in the ancient Americas had phenomenally sophisticated calendars for charting the stars and eclipses and comets. As long as there have been people we have been looking for ways to order it and give it meaning.

One way we do so is to look for repeated patterns that already exist in nature. For example, we know that the Earth spins around once from night to day. We know that the moon completes a cycle about every 29.5 days. We know that it takes about 365.25 days for the earth in its orbit to circle the sun. Nothing we do will change this cosmic order of things.

Another way is to create repeated patterns of our own choosing. People do this in order to get a handle on a world that, especially in earlier eras of less knowledge and education, was far more frightening than it is to many of us today. We take the daily cycle and divide it into 24 hours. We further subdivide this time into 60 minutes per hour, 60 seconds per minute, and so on. We have a weekly cycle of seven days, and an annual cycle of 12 months with varying days.

Yet another way to make sense of our world is to interpret natural cycles with special meaning. We do this when we allow the natural cycles to inform our awareness, such as with the Liturgical Year. In the Liturgical Year, Christians allow the actions of creation to deepen their awareness of the mysteries that are at the core of their Christian Faith. This is not something in the least bit foreign to Christian faith, nor is it a recent "new-age" influence. It is as old as Christianity itself, even older, since Jesus' own Jewish tradition ordered their feasts on both solar and lunar calendars that inform Christian celebrations to this day.


Christians celebrate Easter on the first Sunday of the Jewish month of Nissan. That month begins with the first full moon after the **spring equinox**. This feast is the hinge-pin

around which our liturgical year revolves. About the same time our Northern Hemisphere has reached an equilibrium of light and day-by-day, everything that has life and breath breaks into springtime blooms and births. (It needs to be noted that since the liturgical year was developed largely in the Northern Hemisphere, this perspective has shaped its development and its symbolism.) At this same time, Christians world-over celebrate the victory of life over death in their celebration of the resurrection of Him in whom "all things were made," in whom "we live and move and have our being."

Ancient tradition has it that great men and women were conceived and died on the same date. Recent scholarship suggests that this tradition may have informed when the earliest Christians celebrated Jesus' birth. And sure enough, nine months after this springtime conception, we have another cosmic event - the **winter solstice**. Again, all creation appears to be in total darkness. At the darkest, deadest time of year, the same time as the one who was called "the Light of the World" is believed to have been born, we are moving towards that light, in reality and in faith.

In liturgical traditions, the summer season is commonly called "ordinary time" not out of a sense of any lack of special-ness. You may recall from math class the "ordinal" numbers are the counting numbers: 1, 2, 3, etc. This is "counted" time, when we simply number the Sundays in order. Just as fields of grain and forests and young critters are in their maturing and growing season, those who celebrate the liturgical years follow the primary teachings of Jesus in their own Church readings, fostering their own spiritual growth and development.

As we continue into the fall, our world is in its own harvest time - a time of the end of the growing season. The liturgical year keeps in step with this by recalling the end times of the world in its own readings, awaiting the coming of Him whose Spirit is still among us, yet whose fullness of glory we still await. We also set aside time to remember and honor our dead in November, as we prepare to begin a new liturgical year in the following Advent.

Depending on one's perspective, time can be a burden or a blessing. Faith which informs our perspectives of the created order can help time to be far more blessing than burden, as 2,000 years of tradition have to teach us. 



“The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.”

- Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, SJ

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humans have upon the Earth’s chemistry, geology, and topography. Both Berry and Brian Swimme help us to see that while we are still plagued by homicide and genocide, we have moved to “biocide and geocide, the killing of the life systems on the planet”.

This is where we are. And yet our tendency is to deny this reality. We are entranced by a deep cultural pathology which distracts us from the real.

However, we have such a capacity for living integrally that has not been fully developed, imagined, risked. The birthing of this broadened human capacity is the “**Great Work**” we are called to by Berry and Swimme. Pope John Paul has also called for a deepened sense of humanity by making clear our common call to an “**ecological vocation**”.²

To bring forth a life-giving future we need to move from the current dominant vision of this planet as a collection of objects solely for human use to Earth being a *communion of subjects* for the good of all. Berry and Swimme put forth the challenge that we need to “awaken a consciousness of the sacred dimension of Earth”. In doing this a new era of Earth will be evoked: the *Ecozoic Era* - a time of mutually enhancing human presence upon the Earth.

Where are we? We are at a time and place where our deepest gifts are called forth. A mystique that is more engaging than the commercial-industrial entrancement needs to be birthed if we are to create this new time. As pastoral leaders, busy lay people, stay at home moms and dads - let us all respond with generosity, courage and conviction: for the sake of the Earth and its endowment, for justice and peace to come to those many now in pain, and for the future children of all species to be able to both wonder and find their place in this Sacred Universe.

This Great Work needs to be done in every field, in each situation. And it begins with one’s own conversion and the conversion of our institutions. How do you experience Earth? ☯

**Whatever you dream, or think you can,
begin it.
Boldness has power, genius and magic in it.
Begin it now.**

-Gerte

1. References to Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme are from their book “The Universe Story” 1994.

2. “The idea of an ‘ecological vocation’ has become an urgent moral responsibility in today’s world” -Pope John Paul II. Sunday blessing August 25, 2002.