



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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## Play and Possibility by Maurice Lange, OMI

When was the last time that you engaged in play? For most of us, the initial response is probably "Are you kidding?!" Having worked recently with large numbers of young people in various Earth Day celebrations as well as activities and even retreats based in the neighboring Children's Garden, I have been struck by the spirit of play and the possibility that it brings.

Play elicits **wonder, imagination, delight**. Play evokes **laughter, energy, creativity, spontaneity**. Play calls forth **flexibility**.

Indeed, play is a principle of this creative Universe.

Humans are beginning to enter a paradigm shift: we are recognizing that the Universe is not a rigid collection of objects governed by fixed laws and immutable constructs. Instead, isn't the Universe a playful communion which is developing, emerging, creative and open to such possibility? How else can one explain the story of Earth as one time being molten rock to now singing opera?!<sup>1</sup>

As inherent as play is to the Universe, something happens to many of us human creatures between childhood and adulthood: we forget how to play. The need for play is still there and is indeed expressed. Have not whole industries been constructed around entertainment, gambling, competitive sports and drinking? And yet these do not evoke the wonder and imagination as described above and do not leave us satisfied. They are not true play.

Gwen Gordon states this another way in her recent article on play in Earthlight magazine:

*"The philosopher James Carse, in a brilliant little book called "Finite and Infinite Games", describes the difference between finite and infinite play. Finite play has rigid limits, rules, winners and losers, and does not include everybody in the game. Infinite play, on the other hand, changes the rules as needed and includes everyone. The whole purpose of infinite play is to keep the play going. Now we can see a little more clearly what has gone awry in our world. Without caring*

*connection, infinite play becomes finite. With high stakes, winners and losers, it takes itself very seriously and when you take things too seriously you end up dropping bombs. The ultimate expression of finite play is war."*<sup>2</sup>

And yet, it is in our very make-up as humans, no matter our age, to be playful. This is called *neoteny*. I first heard the term from

Brian Swimme. Neoteny is that quality within humans to retain playful childhood qualities well into our later years. This explains our ability to be creative and inventive. Neoteny is what encourages our sense of humor and our imagination. While many animals outgrow this ability, the human is endowed with it for life!

What might be our gift to the world? What is the role of the human? Answers to these types of questions are shifting as well. Perhaps both our role and our gift have a lot to do with play. Let's engage in infinite, neotonous play thus bringing inclusivity, respect, justice and peace to the playground. ©

1. Brian Swimme. "Canticle to the Cosmos" video series. 1990.

2. "Play: the Movement of Love." Spring 2003, p10.



## Letter from the Director

Warm Summer greetings to one and all! This is a season of long days and fruitfulness. Is it any wonder that we associate Summer with being outside?! Perhaps this goes back to our leaving the indoor classrooms of our youth to three months of freedom being in the outdoor "classroom."

As a boy, I remember making up summer games with my friends outside and even creating my own fun. The 60's invention of that toy which affixed to a garden hose called a "water wiggle" was great! (Does anybody else remember it?) It was a hose itself with a steel curve at the end that jetted the water out. Protected by a plastic head with a goofy face drawn on it, the water wiggle had a mind of its own: turn the faucet on and it provided hours of unabashed, unpredictable fun. That hose would

go crazy shooting here and there, wrapping itself around a tree, a clothesline or even around a shrieking little sister. The water wiggle shot water over you and everything else within 35 yards. It provided a driving "rainstorm" during the fiercest summer droughts. Growing up in Texas, one needed to create wet cool delights to compli-



*Engaging the imagination with fun in the Children's Garden.*

## Summer Solstice, 2004

ment the abundance of legendary heat!

Here at *La Vista* we look forward to a summer of fruitfulness and fun. The **Community Supported Garden** has grown to include 85 shares (up from 65 last year). These families are experiencing the delight of knowing where their vegetables, herbs and flowers are grown, knowing how they are grown (organically), and knowing the farmers who are growing this nourishment (Amy Cloud and Tiffanie Jones.) We'll be gathering monthly during the summer and especially look forward to a "corn roast and pot luck" in late July.

Also this summer, the **La Vista Ecological Learning Center** will be offering an eco-spirituality retreat for students from Northwestern University as well as our annual Earth literacy program in early August.

We offer this issue on play in the spirit of summer! Recognizing the crises that beset our planet and its population, a healthy perspective on play is sorely needed. Evonn Reiersen, a play-filled colleague from Genesis Farm, has dedicated herself to promoting exploration and play in the outdoors with youth and adults. In her story she playfully, mystically broadens the idea of her ecological vocation.

Can we image a playful God? Perhaps Ron Rolheiser's article on the Cosmic Christ will stretch how we see the Creator.

Finally, we encourage your fun and inventiveness this summer. Let's broaden our ideas about "productivity"! The resources below may assist you and others to birth peace through play.

*- Maurice Lange, OMI*

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

### Video:

**The Promise of Play**, three part PBS series. Direct Cinema Limited, 310-636-8200.

### Books:

**Deep Play**, Diane Ackerman, 1999.

**The Art of Play: Helping Adults Reclaim Imagination and Spontaneity**, Adam and Allee Blatner, 1997.

**Finite and Finite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility**, James P. Carse, 1986.

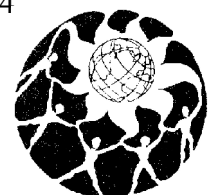
**The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood**, Edith Cobb, 1977.

**The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and Play Ethic**, Joseph Meeker, 1997.

### Organizations:

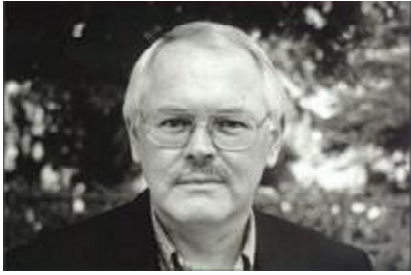
**Original Play Center** - Fred Donaldson's work helping shift the patterns of interaction from aggression and competition to kindness and affection through play. Consulting, workshops and resources. 3800 W. Devonshire Ave., C-78; Hemet, CA 92545; Ofreddybear@aol.com; members.aol.com/\_ht\_a/originalplay/originalplay/index.htm

**New Games** - Cooperative games sometimes including competition where participants play together rather than against one another. P.O. Box 1641, Mendocino, CA 95460, (707) 962-0514



## The Cosmic Christ Stretches Our Imagination

by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI



*Theologian, teacher and award-winning author, Ron Rolheiser, serves in Rome as general councilor for Canada for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was once called to Rome and asked to clarify certain issues in regards to his teachings. At one point, he was asked: "What are you trying to do?" His answer, in effect: "I am trying to write a Christology that is wide enough to incorporate Christ. Christ isn't just an anthropological phenomenon with significance for humanity, but Christ is also a cosmic event with significance for the planet."

Scripture agrees. Christ is more than just an historical person who walked this earth for 33 years, though he is that. He is more than a great teacher, marvellous miracle-worker, and extraordinary moral-exemplar, though he is that too. Indeed Christ is even more than the God-man who died for our sins and rose from the dead, though that is a crucial part of his identity. Christ, the scriptures tell us, is also someone and something within the very structure of the cosmos itself, the pattern on which the universe was conceived, is built, and is now developing.

As the letter to the Colossians puts it: *"Christ is the firstborn of all creation [physical and spiritual]; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created ... all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together."*

This concept challenges the imagination, implying far, far more than we normally dare think. Among other things, it tells us that Christ lies not just at the root of spirituality and morality, but at the base of physics, biology, chemistry, and cosmology as well. This has many implications:


First of all, it means that the spiritual and the material, the moral and the physical, the mystical and the hormonal, and the religious and the pagan do not oppose each other but are part of one thing, one pattern, all infused by one and the same spirit, all drawn to the same end, with the same goodness and meaning. Simply put, the same force is responsible both for the law of gravity and the Sermon on the Mount and both are binding for the same reason.

All reality, be it spiritual, physical, moral, mathematical, mystical, or hormonal is made and shaped according to the one, same pattern and everything (be it the universe itself hurtling through space, the blind attrac-

tion of atoms for each other, the relentless push for growth in a plant, the instinctual hunt for blood by a mosquito, the automatic impulse to put everything into his mouth by a baby, the erotic charge inside the body of an adolescent, the fierce protectiveness of a young mother, the obsession to create inside an artist, or the genuflection in prayer or altruism of a saint) is ultimately part of one and the same thing, the unfolding of creation as made in the image of Christ and as revealing the invisible God.

The fact that Christ is cosmic and that nature is shaped in his likeness means too that God's face is manifest everywhere. If physical creation is patterned on Christ, then we must search for God not just in our scriptures, in our saints, and in our churches, though these shape the boundless nature and energies of God into principles and dogmas in a way that allows us to somehow appropriate them as trustworthy and normative. However if Christ is also the pattern according to which the universe itself is unfolding, then what's good and what's inside of God is also somehow manifest in the raw energy, color, and beauty of the physical, be that the beauty of sunset or a symphony, which we can more easily acknowledge as religious, or be it the more morally ambivalent, but undeniable, beauty that is manifest in the body of a movie star, the voice of a pop singer, or the colorful and lively sexual energy that bubbles inside the culture. Clear or ambivalent, everything reflects the same pattern.

Finally, if Christ is the structure for the cosmic universe itself, the question of the normativeness of Christ for salvation (*"There is no way to salvation, except through Christ."*) poses itself differently. The famous, early Christian hymn in Ephesians speaks of *"a plan to be carried out in the fullness of time to bring all things into one, in Christ."* What's implied here, among other things, is that Christ is bigger than the historical churches, operates beyond the scope of historical Christianity (although admittedly he does operate within it), and has influences prior and beyond human history itself. It is Christ, visible and invisible - the person, the spirit, the power, and the mystery - who is drawing all things, physical and spiritual, natural and religious, non-Christian and Christian, into one. As Kenneth Cragg puts it: *"It will take all the religions of the world to give full expression to the whole Christ."*

Teilhard was right. We need a Christology wide enough to incorporate the whole Christ and our imaginations need still to be stretched. 

# Emergence of an Ecological Vocation (sixth in series)

## by Evonn Reiersen

**ecological** 1. the branch of biology that deals with the relations between living organisms and their environment. 2. in sociology, the relationship between the distribution of human groups with reference to material resources, and the consequent social and cultural patterns.

**vocation** 1. a call, summons, or impulsion to perform a certain function or enter a certain career, especially a religious one; hence 2. the function or career toward which one believes himself to be called.

The sun is rising over me and I Am. I Am breathing in this heat. I Am basking in this light. Thirteen point seven billion years of an unfolding Universe has floated my atoms here, to this ink on this paper, to connect me with you. We have been connected all along, but I Am just coming to live it. It is just dawning on me that my cosmology, my Origin Story, is my vocation. I did not heretofore think I was particularly religious. But look, here it is in Webster's. (I deal with living relations and their environment. I have been chosen to perform such functions. It is not always as dreamlike as it sounds. The "Outdoor Edventure" business I am involved with can be quite ambiguous.)



Evonn preparing for an outdoor "edventure" with inner-city youth.

The Earth is asking us to tell our stories, so that we may begin to understand It's Story, and begin to reflect It's beauty and magnificence.

My ecological vocation was born 13.7 billion years ago, and here is what I feel of It, this instant, that is creating Itself anew. First, there was the Flaring Forth from the tiny Microseed. The Reality we understand as our Universe, emerged in this Miraculous Mystery. Now there is Me, sitting on my dock, recuperating from the Universe's initial Chaos and now reveling in the Joy of leading humans into the wild Earth to experience their relationships with living organisms of all kinds. In between, for 9.2 billion years (all times are approximate, of course), this Divine Energy transformed within the Forces, the Particles, the Light, the Hydrogen, the Helium, the Galactic Clouds, the primal Stars, the first Elements, the next Stars, the Giant Galaxies, the supernova "Tiamat" that birthed our star the Sun and its System. It is up there, I am looking at It, "hung" there 4.5 billion years ago. Our humble, confident, loving, turbulent Earth settled into this intimate relationship with the Sun. And for these past 4.5 billion years, It has been creating This.

Here's more of Earth's backstory....the Rocks, the Water, the Geological Activity, the First Cell, Photosynthesis, the Complex Cell, Heterotrophy, Sexual Reproduction, Jellyfish, Trilobites, Vertebrates, Jaws, Fins, Insects (this fly that is buzzing in my face could annoy me right now, but no, It deserves my respect), Lungs, Wood Wells, Amphibians, Seeds, Wings, Warm-blooded Reptiles, Eggs, Mass Extinction, Dinosaurs, Flowers, Mammals, the Continents Forming, Birds, Marsupials, Primates, Rodents, Bats, early Whales and Horses, a Cosmic Impact, Monkeys, early Cats and Dogs, Apes, Whales, Seals, Grasses, Antelope, another Cosmic Impact, Gibbons, Grazing Animals, Orangutans, Gorillas, Elephants, Chimps, *Australopithacus afarensis*, Camels, Bears, Pigs, the recent Ice Age, *Homo erectus*, another Cosmic Impact, Brown Bears, Wolves, Llamas, *Homo sapiens*, Woolly Mammoths, Polar Bears.....72,000 years ago.

That brings me to my emerging vocation 72,000 years ago. A lot of things in the human realm start happening at this time. We begin having ritual burials, we begin communicating with language and words, celebrations of life, music, dancing, tools, painting,





Cooperation is a principle of the Universe.

domesticating wildlife, planting crops, settling into communities around our work, discovering bioregions, learning to love our little piece of Earth, we invented the wheel and began writing symbols, we began fighting over our little pieces of Earth (the Iraqi War is a continuation of the one that started 3,300 years B.C.E. - Before the Christian Era. We have not stopped warring over our resources for 5,000 years.) The Story continues to emerge: Mathematics, Science, Philosophy, Jesus, the Black Death, more War, War, War, Amazing Discoveries of the Universe by looking closely, looking back at our Planet by flying off of It. **All of This is the Story of the Universe**, as told by some shining humans - Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme in *The Universe Story*.

OK. Now my emergence. I was a sixteen year old Brooklyn Catholic School girl when the three astronauts made it to the Moon and I got to witness it! I had no other word for this but 'Wow'! This experience shifted me, as it did the whole Planet, but there was no language yet for this feeling. So I continued about my middle-class happy life, doing what I could to be a good person, raising my family, being blessed, exploring the Earth and relationships, my vocation as a Dental Hygienist, being as kind as I could living in my old cosmology. I did my best and it could be no other way. It took each and every microinstant to arrive at my Mid-life Crisis. Once there, the blessing of an Earth Literacy Course at Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey, with Sr. Miriam T. MacGillis and Jean and Larry Edwards infused me. There are so many people and events that were interconnected in gratitude at this time, but I will save them for my autobiography. This is how I came to be doing what Thomas Berry calls the 'Great Work': raising consciousness of human/Earth cooperation and mutual enhancement.

Both Genesis Farm and "Project U.S.E.", (which enabled my career as an outdoor adventure facilitator), allow me to feel this Divine Universe. I let myself be humbled and moved with the Magnificence in which we exist. Seeing the bigger picture of where we are alive has instigated the Reality of It. For ten years I have been organizing experiences into the wildness, with people who would not normally be comfortable in their own ecology, to say the least. It is the blessing and challenge and reward of a lifetime to expand myself and others within this expanding Universe by going off into the woods, backpacking, canoeing, rock-climbing, eating wild edibles, explaining 'organic' and where our food and water actually come from, teambuilding, getting out of the fear, exploring dynamics and using the word "interconnectedness". Inner city children, adjudicated youth, educational staffpersons, business folks, families, and any other brave souls entrust me and my colleagues to open them up by playing on Earth and meeting its creatures. It took a certain Blind Madness and much Loving Guidance to do this, as it does the people whom I lead. They do not usually know what they are in for, as is Life, but I try to communicate this Feeling however I can, to the vast diversity of backgrounds and cultures that allow me the Pleasure. I truly enjoy these opportunities to have some Fun with It.

Oh, so many words have passed and I realize I desired to tell the Universe's Story all along. I hope you liked it! Please Pass It On. Thank You. ☺

## *EARTH* Light

The Magazine of Spiritual Ecology

We encourage your support of *Earth Light*. Much of this issue of *La Vista Visions* was inspired by the Spring 2003 issue of *Earth Light*.

"EarthLight is the magazine to read if you are concerned about the fate of the planet, and have a sense that, at its root, this is a profoundly spiritual issue. With lively articles from a wide spectrum of thinkers in touch with the cutting edges of ecological consciousness, EarthLight is an efficient way to keep one's thinking co-evolving with the best ideas of our time."

-- Brian Swimme, mathematical cosmologist,  
author of "The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos"

[www.earthlight.org](http://www.earthlight.org)



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*"I was by God's side, a master craftsman, delighting God day by day, ever at play by God's side, playing on the surface of the Earth, delighting to be with the children of humanity."*

Playful Wisdom is personified and present at the Creation - - in Proverbs 8:30-31

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## How Can I Participate?

All people seeking a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth are welcome to participate in the scheduled programs and the Community Supported Garden of the Oblate Ecological Initiative. Just call or write for more information and/or to register.

Due to the wonderful response, the CSG is full for this year. We are putting those interested in becoming shareholders on a priority list for next year. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in the office as well as the garden.

Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI is available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact him with your request.

We do ask that guests and shareholders respect this site and its primary function as a novitiate. Visits to the office and garden are made by appointment. Please call Fr. Maurice for directions at 618-466-5004.

Visit us on the web at [www.lavistacsa.org](http://www.lavistacsa.org).

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

## ***Deepen your Ecological Vocation!***

### **"Exploring the Sacred Universe"**

#### ***Earth Literacy Program***

***August 3-10, \$400***

The Oblate Ecological Initiative invites you to explore the Universe Story on Scenic Bluffs overlooking the mile-wide Mississippi River!

*Come explore Creation's integrity for a week along the bluffs! As we sit with the wonder, awe and newness of the Universe Story, we will also critically examine the perceptions that currently fashion our cultural world view. Recognizing the inherent spiritual dimension in the universe, a re-connection to the Creator through Creation will be facilitated. In addition to the guided activities and instruction, there is a strong emphasis on immersion into the natural world and on developing practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life-style.*

**For more information or to register,  
please call 618-466-5004.**