



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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Winter 2006  
Volume 5, Issue 20

## A Look at Jesus Embedded in the Whole of Creation

by Elaine M. Prevallet, SL

...Like the early Christians, we in our time also ask: what are the implications of God's incarnation in Jesus?

First, we can recognize the fundamental Word of love that God speaks to us in Jesus **embedded in the whole of creation**. There are lessons available to us in the rest of creation: the birds of the air have no part in designing how they are fed, and the lilies of the field receive their beauty as a gift. There is a trustworthy pattern to the creation, each species in its own niche performing its own cooperative function for the good of the whole, all cared for by a Presence that sustains the process in its integrity and goodness.

We can perceive that Word of love in the elemental structure called gravity, which draws things together; we can find it in interacting molecules, hear it in the mating calls of birds, or feel it in the attraction between human beings. Things come together; the coming together changes them; something new results. Everywhere, if we have eyes to see, there is evidence of God's love at work in the whole creation, drawing things together into creative new configurations, little by little seeking ever deeper and more complex unity. Everything on Earth (and, metaphorically at least, even stars and planets, which are born and die) participates in this vast process, continually changing and exchanging, emerging in new form. And so we see that Word of love operating in the principle that *everything in creation exists only by sharing its life*.

Jesus, born of Mary of Nazareth, was made of the same material as we are – his body's fluids the same as those of the

oceans, the minerals in his bones the same as Earth's materials, just as ours are. Jesus depended for his breathing on the trees, on the animals and green growing things for his food, on water for his thirst. His life was inseparable from the rest of creation, just as our lives are. God's incarnation in Jesus implies, then, God's presence to the whole of creation whose elemental processes working together kept Jesus alive on Earth and continue to sustain the world as we know it.



As Christians, we affirm that Jesus' divinity is not a compartment separated from his body or from the rest of his life process. God cannot be wholly present in Jesus without being present to the rest of creation. Over centuries, however, and particularly in the West since the Industrial Revolution, we humans began to perceive ourselves as disconnected from the rest of creation, holding ourselves as separate, superior, dominant. We also dualistically separated God from embodiment in the totality of Jesus' be-

ing. In doing so, of course, we disconnected Jesus from his own participation in the ongoing process of life's development.

Jesus' life demonstrates precisely, in human behavior, the pattern of life of the whole Earth community. What God reveals in Jesus is that when (and insofar as) a human lives in complete and integral alignment with the fundamental principle that everything lives by sharing its life, then God's consistent promise of solidarity with humanity, so central to the Hebrew Scriptures, is fulfilled in a completely unexpected way. For his followers throughout the ages, Jesus is God-with-us, the embodiment of God. He is the human whose attitudes and actions exemplify not only the solidarity of justice and equality among humans, but also open the way to the

(continued on page 6)

## Letter from the Director

## Winter Solstice, 2006

Winter.

Even the very name of each of the four seasons is rich with images. What does this season of Winter “feel” like? What pictures pop into mind? What comes to my mind just now are the words of a Soviet Cosmonaut written as he was high above Earth looking back at our planet:

*“One morning I woke up and decided to look out the window, to see where we were. We were flying over America and suddenly I saw **snow**, the first snow we ever saw from orbit. Light and powdery, it blended with the contours of the land, with the veins of the rivers. I thought – autumn, snow – people are busy getting ready for winter. A few minutes later we were flying over the Atlantic, then Europe, and then Russia. I have never visited America, but I imagined that the arrival of autumn and winter is the same there as in other places, and the process for getting ready for them is the same. And then it struck me that we are all children of our Earth. It does not matter what country you look at. We are all Earth’s children, and we should treat her as our Mother.”*



and their myriad species of insects, microbes and plants live seasonally. This Autumn we delighted in the abundance of *so many* vegetables that thrive in the cooler weather. Now, in Winter, the Garden rests.

What rest might we be called to this Winter? What mindsets and worldviews need to lay fallow? Which part of us could stand some dormancy?

The Christian observance of Advent (the 3-4 week season of preparation just before Christmas) encourages a waiting, a longing for, a fuller imagination. In contradistinction to the “shopping season” – Advent and early Winter assist us to “get ready” interiorly.

**Elaine Prevallet** assists us with her lead story to make ready. She encourages our hearts to feel “God’s love at work in the whole creation.” In our second article my friend and Oblate brother **Norm**

**Comtois** also points to Divine Immanence and how this awakening has drawn forth a deepened sense of vocation.

As we conclude our fifth year of the **Ecological Learning Center** and fourth season of the **Community Supported Garden** we are grateful. Grateful for the soil and its nourishment. Grateful for our friends and supporters. Grateful for Earth, Universe and Ultimate Mystery.

Here at *La Vista*, our fields lay silent. **Farmer Kris Larson** has prepared them for Winter by planting a cover crop. Fields

May the blessings of Winter and Christmas bring healing and wholeness to your family and to the Earth community. ☺

- Maurice Lange, OMI

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

### *Green Gift-giving Ideas*

**COME HERE TO THE BLUFFS!** - Explore the green Calendar of Events included in this newsletter and give to yourself by participating in one or more of our offerings here at *LaVista Ecological Learning Center*. Double your gift and invite a friend to join you!

**ART AS GIFT!** - Posters, cards, and other art by Mary Southard, CSJ, our featured artist, can be purchased at **[www.ministryofthearts.org](http://www.ministryofthearts.org)** or by contacting the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange. Ministry of the Arts 1515 W. Ogden Ave., LaGrange Park, IL 60526 1-800-354-3504

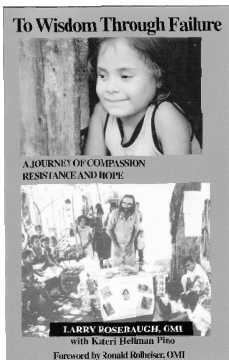
**HYBRID YULETIDE!** - For information on how to find the right vehicle for your needs, save money on gas, and pollute less, visit **[www.motherearthnews.com](http://www.motherearthnews.com)** and search for “Fuel Economy and Ecology: Green Means Go”

# Wintertime Reading

## To Wisdom Through Failure: A Journey of Compassion, Resistance, and Hope

By Larry Rosebaugh, OMI, Epica 2006

Reviewed by Darrell Rupiper, OMI



Although a close friend of Larry's for fifty plus years, I am as if stunned at the fullness of living which characterizes his life. Larry has followed the promptings of his spirit-filled heart with a tenacity and persistence that is both remarkable and enviable.

How many men (priests) do you know who rode a bicycle from El Salvador to Texas, never owned a car, bought a motorcycle at age 70, lived on the streets of Chicago and Recife, spent years in prison for reasons of conscience, who sits motionless in prayer for lengths of time, has fire come out of his eyes when he plays volleyball, or who was forced to watch helplessly as three of his parishioners were beaten to death by other parishioners?

Throughout the book I was haunted by the question: How can this man have seen so much ugliness and suffering and not be filled with bitterness and hatred? I found the answer in the final chapter Tying Up the Threads: "If we look for the seeds of life in the dark we move ahead instead of

drowning in the pain."

Read the book, and you will meet the man and still be left wondering. To order: visit, e-mail, or phone Epica at [www.epica.org](http://www.epica.org), [admin@epica.org](mailto:admin@epica.org), 202-332-0292.

*Darrell Rupiper is an Earth Literacy graduate and teaches/preaches Creation Spirituality & Earth Care in parishes. Darrell can be contacted at [drupiper2000@hotmail.com](mailto:drupiper2000@hotmail.com) or 760-469-7323.*

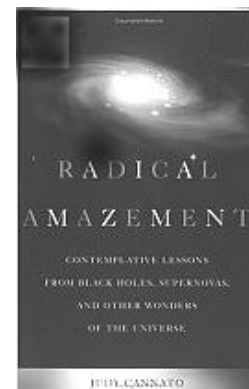
## Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe

By Judy Cannato, Ave Maria Press, 2006

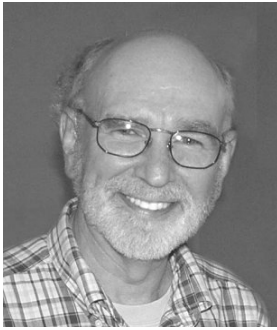
Reviewed by Ruth Schejbal

Judy Cannato's book, *Radical Amazement*, builds on the idea of Thomas Aquinas that a mistake in our understanding of creation will necessarily cause a mistake in our understanding of God. The numerous discoveries made by science over the last century have provided us with new insights into the story of creation, and as this new story becomes a part of our awareness, it challenges us to expand the way we think about and respond to all the life around us. The term "radical amazement" comes from Abraham Heschel's belief that wonder is the proper response to the Divine. Unfortunately, in today's busy world, we only allow ourselves time for brief glances at the all of life rather than the long, loving looks of contemplation. We seem to have lost our sense of wonder and awe. As Judy Cannato states, "*Radical Amazement* is above all an invitation to live contemplatively, to get caught up in an awe-filled vision that evokes an immediate, active and compassionate response."

Besides being solid reading for one's personal reflection, *Radical Amazement* is also a book to be shared with others in group discussions, with each chapter ending with several questions to ponder and discuss. A few of the topics included are: the Big Bang, evolution, photosynthesis, morphogenic fields, supernovas and the theory of holons. This book provides all of us the opportunity to realize the connectedness of all that is.



*Ruth Schejbal is an enthusiastic participant in many Learning Center programs and a shareholder in the Community Supported Garden. "I attended the Earth Literacy Program over three years ago, and it has continued to affect my life in my experience with the Divine, in the books I read, in the way I try to lead my life, and hopefully in my sense of awe and wonder to all that is."*



## Call Within a Call

### Bioregional Missionary

by Norm Comtois, OMI

#### Asking the Right Question

Several years ago the Universe Story had such a profound impact on me that I began reevaluating those familiar questions: “Who am I?”

“Where am I going?” As a person of faith, I wondered how I could live out my vocational choices within this expanded context. I took these concerns to Miriam MacGillis, who insightfully suggested: “*You may want to ask, ‘How does the **universe** want to be priest and religious through you?’ rather than ‘How do **you** want to be priest and religious?’*”

At that moment I realized that vocation was not about **my** choosing but about the **universe** choosing through me. Religious life is not only about my ego, my choice, my responsibility, my decision, my ministry. It is ultimately about relationship with the Divine acting in, through, with me. I then immersed myself in learning more about the epic of evolution and discovered that the call was about a re-alignment with the Powers of the Universe.<sup>1</sup>

#### Call Within a Call

The call to religious life is evolving in a new way today. We are being invited to reinvent ourselves in alignment with Thomas Berry’s principle that, “All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, many of us, religious and laity alike, are discovering a call within the Call.

This reinvention will necessitate major changes for each of us. Jim Conlon reminds us that, “Lawyers will be called to defend the rights of Earth and every species on it. Doctors will realize that they must support and foster the self-healing properties of the planet. Therapists will see themselves as companions who support the spiritual emergence of those who journey with them and whose lives are also an expression of an impulse toward health and wholeness. Theologians and ministers of religion will be called to focus their work more on creation than redemption. They will see themselves as reminders of the sacredness of life—and in fact of all existence. They will see their own lives and the narratives of their spiritual journeys as integral to the unfolding story of the universe itself.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Emerging Consciousness

New awareness leads to the emergence of new ministry, a call within a call. Life shifts dramatically with the guidance of the fundamental principles of differentiation, interiority, and communion on behalf of the integrity of creation.

#### Differentiation

I have a chance to express my own uniqueness by teaching classes and designing retreats and workshops. During these retreats and workshops, people share their thoughts and questions about spirituality, God, themselves, and their world view. As a spiritual director, I invite individuals to awaken, listen, and commune with all of creation, so that they may learn to read the Book of Nature as primary divine revelation.

#### Interiority

My prayer now includes the celebration of the Great Liturgy through the seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, meditation at dawn and dusk, celebration of the Christian feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, weekly walks in the local forest, and monthly retreats by the ocean.

#### Communion

I experience communion in a variety of intentional communities where people discuss Thomas Berry’s invitation to the Great Work, Robert Keck’s quest for the sacred, Teilhard’s inspiration for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We listen to Brian Swimme and delight in the way he evokes awe and wonder within us as we incorporate the Powers of the Universe. We create ritual.

#### Bioregional Missionary

Bioregional Missionary is about seeing the suffering of the planet, not just the cry of the poor but also global warming, extinction of species, deforestation, and pollution of water. Being a Bioregional Missionary is to live in a way that heals the pain and speaks good news to our impoverished planet in a specific bioregion.

Reinventing religious life in the context of the Universe Story also affects the understanding of missionary work. The word missionary ordinarily connotes being sent to far away lands.

We go elsewhere to bring the message of the Gospel. However, bioregionalism challenges that idea by encouraging us to think globally and act locally.

To live as a bioregional community requires time and commitment to a region. We need time to recognize its unique food, its fauna and flora, to learn the way Earth teaches itself through its unnumbered billions of experiments. We need time to feel the recuperative powers and healing of Earth, to celebrate the unseen mysteries of a particular community of beings.

### Where Is God?

At the conclusion of her book, *Mammals Who Morph*, Jennifer Morgan noted that many have asked her, "Where is God in the story?" That is a common question asked of all of us who work in the ministry of Integrity of Creation. The word Universe is oftentimes used where we would normally use the word God. Morgan tells us that one

*"...reason for this is that people usually refer to 'God' as a transcendent, supernatural creator who exists outside the physical world. Today we are rediscovering a sense of divine creativity, not simply in the transcendent mode, but also as immanent, as present within the Universe."*

This is consistent with the words of Thomas Berry who describes himself as a geologist. A geologist is one who sees the Divine in all created matter, and who believes that from the very beginning the universe, including our Earth, is a spiritual-material reality. The use of cosmological language is an exercise in awakening consciousness to the deep incarnational reality. We are, therefore, invited to ask with Jennifer Morgan, "Where is God *not* in the Universe Story?"<sup>4</sup>

### One Way of Living the Call

Acting locally in mutually enhancing relationships means living with the inconvenient truth of changing long standing habits. It means recycling, reducing paper use, composting, avoiding disposable products, conserving water and energy. It means pur-

chasing organically grown vegetables and fruits.

Most recently the Provincial Council of the Missionary Oblates in conjunction with my own interests purchased a second hybrid vehicle, a Toyota Prius. Hybrid gets its power from a gasoline engine supplemented by an electric motor. Toyota calls this combination the Hybrid Synergy Drive. The Hybrid Synergy Drive is another contribution to living a mutually enhancing Earth-relationship. For each gallon of gasoline saved, hybrids prevent 18 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions. Because the hybrid operates at 50-60 miles per gallon, approximately 7,000 fewer pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> are released into the atmosphere each

year. A hybrid vehicle seems to be more costly than comparable gas engine cars. But is it? Measured against the cost of gasoline, the cost of personal health care due to environmental pollution, the loss of the Arctic Refuge, the cost of wars which have oil at their roots, and the negative impact on the lives of the poor of the world, does it truly cost more?

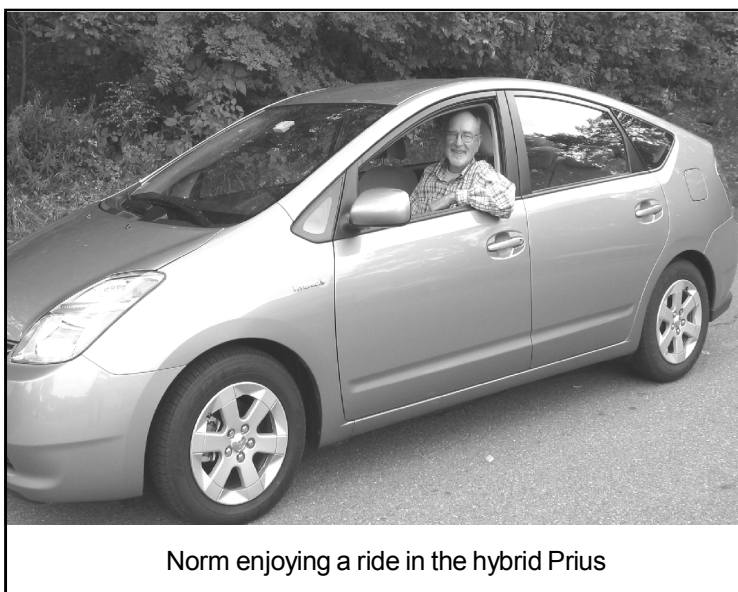
The hybrid is an example of re-invention where the best of technology is used to bring about a new concept in transportation. If

we can learn more about the use of hybrid technology we will see it as a metaphor and begin to incorporate the success of the past with the vision of the future and discover the meaning of a call within a call. ☺

### Notes:

1. *Powers of the Universe*, a DVD series presented by Brian Swimme
2. Taken from an interview with Thomas Berry and further developed in his book: *The Great Work*, chapter 14 and in *Evening Thoughts*, chapter 5
3. James Conlon, *The Sacred Impulse*, p 26
4. Jennifer Morgan, *Mammals Who Morph*, p 47

**Norm Comtois, OMI**, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Spiritual Director, and Pastoral Counselor, is on the staff of *Berakah*, a renewal program for women religious and a center for summer retreats. In addition, he travels here to Godfrey each August to serve as a team member of our Earth Literacy Program.



Norm enjoying a ride in the hybrid Prius



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“The whole multiple and varied universe manifests the divine goodness more perfectly than any single creature could do.”

-St. Thomas Aquinas

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possibility of complete communion with the Divine. Such a life embodies justice, love, peace – all that God hopes for humankind; it elicits and brings to fruition the presence and power of the divine within the human/earth community. It manifests in the “reign of God.”

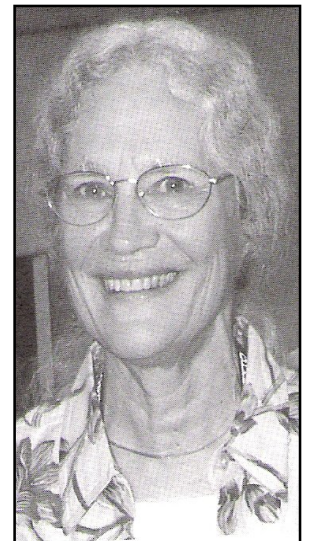
It is as if God is saying to us: “You humans, if you want to see what a human life looks like when it is lived in complete accord with my intent, my Word of love which is embedded in creation from the beginning, then *look at Jesus.*” ☉

An excerpt from *Toward a Spirituality for Global Justice: A Call to Kinship* by Elaine Prevallet, OP. Sowers Books and Videos, Louisville, KY, 2005.

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### **Elaine Prevallet, SL**

holds an MA in Theology and a PhD in Religious Studies from Marquette University. After nine years of college teaching, she was on the teaching staff at Pendle Hill, a Quaker adult learning community near Philadelphia. Elaine then served for 22 years as Director of Knobs Haven Retreat Center at Loretto Motherhouse. She is a frequent contributor to “Weavings,” A Journal of Christian Spirituality, and other publications.



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