



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Blessed Darkness, Sacred Fire

by Maurice Lange, OMI

Perhaps this is your favorite time of year. Maybe it isn't. I must admit that it is not mine... and yet how to remain open? I want to make sense out of the immense darkness this part of the Earth is enveloped in during these early Winter weeks.

What might one encounter if one remains faithful to *this* season? (For indeed, the rest of the natural world is faithful at this time, at all times.) How might our perspectives, desires, activities and lifestyle be brought into *harmony* with the wisdom of Earth's cycles and seasons and systems?

Darkness. How has darkness - half of existence on this planet - become a thing humans attempt to shun, avoid, cast off? Indeed when examined from an ecological perspective: darkness is blessed, and so necessary. The short days of this time of year may bring forth a sense of *bleakness, coldness, death*. However, darkness can birth images like *dormancy, rest, lying fallow* which offer a hopeful perspective.

In our human attempts to flee the dark of night and of Winter, we light up the planet. Indeed, when viewing Earth from outer space at night, the planet is not dark - but one sees globs of electrical light.¹ A rabbi, once commenting on this new reality wondered, "How much light can the planet at night tolerate?" Wow, such an enlarged sense of compassion! And yet it's been proven that city trees under street lights are not as healthy as those growing in darker parts of the same city. Why do the trees and the planet and you and I *need* darkness as well as light?

Perhaps it's the way Earth and its inhabitants have evolved. Not every planet has a *day- night sequence* (think of the dark side of the moon) nor even the *cycle of seasons*...but this unique Earth does and has for billions of years! Thus, the rhythm of darkness and light has been the *milieu* in which microbes and mammals have come to flourish. The need for both darkness

and light is encoded in the genetic makeup that most Earth creatures share.

To assist your pondering of blessed darkness...can you recall a positive memory in your life regarding darkness? It may have been on a camping trip, or gazing at the night sky. It may have been your not running from

a "dark night" of the soul. One memory that stands out for me was during my novitiate year. We were charged with a summer ministry of working with inner-city kids. What an enlarged perspective they taught us novices! However both groups grew through an experience our ministerial leader invited us into. We took a van-trip out of the city, through the suburbs and out into wilderness where we finally came to a large and deep cave. It was thrilling for both the youth and us novices to explore the features of the cave as we entered, turned on our flashlights and walked seemingly a couple of hundred yards to the cave's end. There in Earth's recesses we shared our excitement and gratitude for the beauty and mystery surrounding us. Then our leader informed us that as we were about to turn around and make our way back out the length of the cave, we were to turn our flashlights off. Well, can you imagine the darkness? Such blackness as I had never seen! Of course there was a bit of panic and stumbling and flashlights coming back on. But our

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Letter from the Director

Happy Winter from here on the bluffs overlooking the frozen Mississippi River! May the gift of this New Year of life awaken us to create a mutually enhancing relationship with the rest of the natural world.

In this issue of La Vista Visions we explore faithfulness. Most of us would say that God is faithful. We strive to be full of faith in turn. And yet, this time of post-Christmas plus the January blues make many want to flee to some warmer clime, to some brighter time of year. Our lead reflection on the blessings encountered this season of the year by way of faithfulness will hopefully inspire your fidelity to time and place.

My colleague in this work, Gail Worcelo, also offers a faith-filled experience of morning prayer in the midst of an expanding Universe. I am sure her reflection will inspire an expanded sense of the Divine within you! What a great way to begin a year!



Winter Solstice, 2005

The coming of the New Year invites us to look back in gratitude and to look ahead in faithfulness:

*Here at the Oblate Ecological Initiative we conclude the forth year of the **La Vista Ecological Learning Center** and the third season of the **Community Supported Garden at La Vista**. The past year the *Learning Center* has seen increases in Earthy programs and even Earthier participants! The shareholder base of the *Garden* grew from 100 to 140 families. This growth points to a deepened desire to be aligned with the primary revelation of God: the unfolding story of Creation. We are thankful and encouraged to a deeper faith.

*We graciously accept the gifts to come in the year ahead. The *Learning Center* is working toward a further expansion of programming and inviting more participants. All people of good will are welcome for our scheduled programs! (please see the green insert containing the 2006 calendar of events) The *Garden* wishes to announce the hiring of our new farmer: **Kristopher Larson**. Kris comes to us from Massachusetts having farmed for several years on both the east and west coast. He brings his young family and a deep sense of sustainable farming as a vocation. Kris begins work here in January and we look forward to nourishing harvests to come. Welcome Kris!

In the blessing of the year to come may our faith be deepened and our visions be broadened. May this issue help to engage the long Winter nights for pondering our place within the Universe. May we grow consciously in our connection with, what indigenous people call, "*all our relations*".



- Maurice Lange, OMI

Creating A Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

Blessing the Winter, Befriending the Season

- * Create a space within your room or home for quiet reflection...construct a simple prayer corner, throw a meditation rug, put a chair near a window and watch a birdfeeder...
- * Reduce your consumption this winter...be creative in ways to simplify!
- * Drive less! Combine your errands into 1 trip ...carpool...ask yourself "Is this trip in the car really necessary?!"
- * Reflect on what you eat. So much of the "food" we mindlessly consume is not nourishing. Can we have the heart to simplify our food choices and possibly eat even less?
- * Read something that truly nourishes! "*Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*" includes essays by leading thinkers as well as a study guide for groups and individuals.
- * Turn off excess lights! Light a candle – it creates more of a Winter mood.



Join Us - Summer 2006 Earth Literacy!

The Oblate Ecological Initiative invites you to explore the Universe Story on Scenic Bluffs overlooking the mile-wide Mississippi River in Godfrey, Illinois.

Come explore Creation's integrity for a week along the bluffs! As we sit with 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, thus, a strong emphasis on immersion into the natural world and on developing practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life-style.

2006 Earth Literacy Program "Exploring the Sacred Universe"
August 3-10, 2006 \$400

Please call for more information or to register: (618) 466-5004
www.lavistacsa.org



Discovering the Divine within the Universe

By Gail Worcelo, CP

THE BELL RINGS at 5 a.m., an early morning call to prayer. It is the beginning of our monastic day here in Vermont. It is time for Morning Vigil. At this hour, all is in darkness except for the one candle lighting our prayer space. I take my place on the cushion and join the others gathered for our hour of contemplative prayer.

This time of Vigils is the night watch hour, a time to touch the mysterious presence of God at the heart of the Universe. We discover, as the Gospel of John tells us, that "the Light shines in the darkness."

This morning I experience this literally. There is a large skylight above my head and in this pre-dawn darkness I can see the shining stars of the Milky Way Galaxy. The words of the psalmist come to mind, "Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, shining stars!"

I reflect on the fact that I am made of that same star stuff. The luminous fire that burns in those stars has burned through 15 billion years of Universe unfolding and burns in me this morning. It burns in my hunger for the Holy. It burns in



every leaf, animal, stone and bird. It is the Fire within the fire of all things.

This is the same fire that ignited the burning bush that jolted Moses and made him take off his shoes and exclaim, "This place is Holy Ground." I try to absorb these words from the Old Testament: "This place is Holy Ground."

I want to situate myself within the fullness of this understanding and push my contemplation beyond old limiting notions which subscribe God to some abstract heaven. The book of Wisdom declares: "The Spirit of God fills the whole world!" I want to know this world filled with the Spirit of God and situate myself in its larger context.

Towards the end of his life Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "Less and less do I see any difference between research and adoration." For Teilhard as for other poets and mystics, prayer was a meditation on the Universe, informed by knowledge open to Mystery.

I reflect upon how technology has given us the capacity to extend our senses, to be able to see and hear what has always been there but what we were unable to know with unaided senses. We have suddenly been given a glimpse of the footprints of God embedded in the cosmos as we come to understand how the Universe works.



The author (r) with Fr. Thomas Berry and Sr. Bernadette Bostwick.

We come out of 15 billion years of unfolding, we are vital dust, a further development of the original fireball. In this morning prayer I try to locate myself in our galactic neighborhood. The galaxy in which I pray is 100,000 light years wide. A single light year is equal to six trillion miles. Our nearest neighbor, the Andromeda Galaxy, is 2.3 million light years away.

This takes some time to absorb. We are located in vastness, in the vast heart of God. Although I sit still and firm during this time of meditation, I reflect upon the fact that the Earth is revolving at 900 miles an hour. It is orbiting the sun at 19 miles/second. We are moving as a solar system at 40,000 miles/hour around the center of our galaxy, and our galaxy is expanding at 12 million miles/minute.

This is the context in which I find myself as I sit down to pray. Things are anything but still. I imagine God dancing with wild abandon through the farthest reaches of the cosmos. In today's Gospel of John, the words "Abide in me as I abide in you" take on new meaning. The place where the Divine abides is much vaster than we can imagine. Abide in me means "abide in my vastness, abide in my Universe."

There is a realization taking place within me, as my eyes reach out through the skylight, that the deeper I go in prayer the farther out I go in the cosmos. Inner and outer are one. This is what the mystics of our Christian tradition understood as they went deeper into the inner experience of God. They experienced a harmonization of their lives with the greater rhythms of existence. They knew by faith what science knows empirically, that the Universe is charged with the presence and reality of the Divine.

These mystics allowed the fire of contemplation to transform them into a union of love with all of creation. They understood that Divine Radiance floods the Universe making all things holy.

I know this too in a deep intuitive way. I think we all do. The night sky begins to give way to the

dawn as the Milky Way becomes a faint memory this morning. Before the bell rings to call this hour of prayer to a close I remember the words of Annie Dillard, "The world has two kinds of nuns, there are those inside and those outside of convents. Which-ever kind she is, the nun's vocation is contemplation of the real."

The bell rings as the first glimmer of dawn appears in the morning sky. The hour of prayer is over. I blow out the prayer candle, extinguishing the flame. Yet I know full well that the Fire within the fire of all things still burns in every creature, galaxy and star and in every person who hungers for the Holy. ☯



Sr. Gail Worcelo began an Ecozoic Monastery in the Green Mountains of Vermont. Along with Sr. Bernadette Bostwick and with the help of Fr. Thomas Berry, CP, the Monastery is dedicated to the healing of the Earth.

Ora et Labora

The traditional Benedictine Motto of *Ora et Labora*, pray and work, is what Green Mountain Monastery invites people into. You are welcome to join for any of the Monastery's upcoming retreat weeks or weekends. Each day unfolds within a balanced rhythm of prayer and meditation, physical work, input and sharing as community. Contact Green Mountain Monastery for further details.

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*“At night make me one with the darkness.
In the morning make me one with the light.”*

- Wendell Berry



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leader gently quieted us and invited us to befriend the darkness, the way the cave is all the time. He suggested that we make our way by helping each other: linking hands and describing to the person behind us what formation may come up along the trail. That was one of the richest experiences of my life: the darkness of the cave was no longer threatening, but amidst our trust and providing for each other, the darkness became a blessing of great wonder and awe.

What blessings might we discover by being faithful to this season of Winter? ☯

Footnote¹ - To see Earth at night from space, go to
<http://antwpr.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod.ap001127.html>

You darkness, of whom I am born—

*I love you more than the flame
that limits the world
to the circle it illumines
and excludes all the rest.*

*But the darkness embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
people, nations—just as they are.*

*It lets me imagine
a great presence stirring beside me.*

I believe in the night.

From Rilke's Book of Hours
Translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

The Oblate Ecological Initiative
is a ministry of the
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