

DEITY IN ZERO-G

An extra-terrestrial perspective on the Divine.

Saros Talks 1992: Leaving Home - An Exploration of our Future in Outer Space.

When it was released, the science-fantasy film 'ET' was one of the most successful films of all time in box-office terms. Why, when it has no great romantic love-story or mega-stars, no exotic locations or spectacular backdrop? Most of it is set in a boy's bedroom in suburban America, and that lump of rubber latex is no Mr.Darcy. Yet it set heart-strings twanging across the known world. 'Inspirational' some said. Grown men and assorted cynics were reduced to jelly by it.

I think the emotion it stirred up wasn't the usual variety we pay good money to exercise. It had a quasi-religious flavor, something to do with the concept of brotherhood extended to beings very different to ourselves; and with the possibility of finding that despite gross dissimilarities of our physical forms, some sort of understanding and common ground can exist between us, transcending all appearances and the unthinkable disparities of background. It touches something deep.

What is it touching? Why is this particular emotion so moving? It's something very close to the essence of what it means to be human, which makes all the more interesting the idea of this essential human contact with one who is clearly not Homo Sapiens. We seem to be reaching toward a commonality which is beyond our species identity, but is still very important to us.

The religious dimension is even more pronounced at the end of 'Close Encounters', where the alien craft looms like a vast temple from which emerge rays of light, heavenly music and the veiled silhouettes of ethereal beings which are both frail and potent at the same time. Immensely stirring stuff this, and *deeply* stirring; reaching parts that many other kinds of emotional stimulus do not reach. At least for some of us; no doubt some wonder what all the fuss is about.

Anyway, having seen 'ET' rather too often (for the sake of my children, you understand), I am now ready for the follow-up, a real Adult version (not 18 certificate, but let's say 45 plus, when people are old enough to take ultimate questions really seriously). In this film, ET goes to church, or digests a quick salad of the world's religious tracts, and gives us his views, not only on our own religious situation, but lets us know about the God or gods of his race, and what forms of religious expression they employ where he comes from. The making of such a film, though, would require a team of extra-terrestrial anthropologists, and as these are thin on the ground in the earthly Seats of Learning, we may

have to wait a bit.

Why would I want to see such a film? Because, as has already been raised in this series of talks, if it should become materially clear and incontrovertible that we are not alone in this big, big universe, there will be an almighty shake-up of our value systems, and first and foremost among them, religion. Here, I think, is the real root of the fear usually depicted as fear of superior alien invaders with high-tech weapons of destruction and predatory intent. Perhaps, but gross assaults are hardly necessary. These aliens have only to prove they *exist* for all our dearest assumptions to come under attack, a situation which is truly terrifying.

Assuming the Future

I think we should arm ourselves for the possibility by jumping ahead, even if speculatively. Let us assume an extra-terrestrial future, and from this perspective look at what we have and at what we might evolve. The most fear-inducing foe is the one you can't see, so if we give the unknown a face, a shape, it may become more manageable and less menacing.

If you came to the talk 'Life in the Universe' in this series, you will have heard the scientific arguments and the evidence for the probability of there being other intelligent life in the universe. The likelihood of its existence is high, but whether we will encounter it, and when, is another question.

I know there are those who claim to have encountered it already. My only comment on flying-saucer phenomena and other mysterious communications from Outer Space is that I know that the universe is full of wonders and unfathomable. I also know that human beings interpret experience in all kinds of ways, and some of these interpretations are more useful than others for coming to grips with the mystery of existence.

Personally, I consider it useful to suspend belief and disbelief, and to aim at intelligent speculation, which involves extrapolating from the known to the unknown, not indulging in bizarre flights of fancy (which, of course, are much more fun). So, presuming that religion will be high on the hit-list when the first 'Hello' shatters the interstellar silence, we should first wonder about what makes us religious and whether the ET's are likely to share the bug.

There are those who think religion is a charming or pernicious fantasy, which will be outgrown as we

evolve. For others the spiritual drive is a fundamental potency in human psychology which can be developed and matured. In this view, if humanity is to evolve further, religious understanding will be a very important factor in it. The word evolution implies some sort of permanent change or unfolding of inherent possibilities taking place at the species level. I can't think of anything more likely to promote evolution in us as a species than having to cope with the harsh and unwieldy environment of space, and to adapt to or integrate with whatever we find there.

Perhaps adaptation to radically different conditions will produce physical changes in our bodies and sensory apparatus. I'm sure there will be psychological changes, and probably permanent ones. If the religious impulse in us is a fundamental, creative drive of the species as I consider it to be, I would imagine that finding an appropriate way to express it in a totally new environment will be crucial to shaping and having a future.

As is clear from looking around, individual human beings have choice about whether or not they want to develop their understanding of religion. But the species has an agenda of its own. As individuals we do not know what this is, the only clue being the pervasiveness and importance of religion in human history.

We alone on this planet possess self-awareness. Without this ability to reflect upon ourselves there would be no religion. Animals don't exhibit religious behaviour....(except perhaps in America. There, pets can have a Christian burial, but I've yet to hear of them marrying in church.) Religion is a consequence of self-reflection, so I would fairly confidently expect any other beings who have an equivalent type of self-reflective consciousness, to have religious awareness as well, and probably to express it through some sort of collective religion.

Spielberg's ET was depicted as a creature with a similar intelligence to our own. His motivations and thought-processes seemed a little strange and unpredictable, but different conditioning and experience could account for that. (I've encountered some pretty bizarre and unpredictable humans, for that matter.)

Once certain rules of communication had been established between them, understanding and empathy grew between the alien and his human allies, and human-type intelligence was evident. In other words, it wasn't the kind of empathy you can have with a dog. It involved language and abstraction.

Other Religion

So even if ET himself was not gung-ho for religion, I would expect him to have at least inherited a concept of the divine. Some of his race will have turned their self-aware consciousness towards the ultimate questions. Some of them will have wanted to know the 'Why?' of the universe, and will have fine-tuned their perceptions of such things.

What they perceived will surely have been passed on to others, formulated into doctrines, translated into imagery and story. Rituals and acts of communal worship will have grown up so that a number together can join tentacles, as it were. In addition, the original vision is bound to have set up certain values for everyday life, i.e. an ethical and moral code will have been incorporated into the social fabric. Where we find all these things, we find Religion.

I am anticipating some jolly times when the other planetary versions arrive on the desks of comparative religionists, because of the exuberant possibilities of detail. However, all the religions we know have features in common, naturally, given that they are responding to our psychological needs. Of course, alien psychology must be different from ours, in ways we can't yet conceive, but if they are self-aware individuals like us, we ought to be able to meet them on some common ground, and their religions should exhibit some familiar features too.

I am assuming a similar consciousness to our own in our galactic neighbours. What could the other alternatives be?

Well, they could be conscious, sentient, but less self-aware than ourselves, like the animal kingdom on this planet. But in this case they would have neither technology nor religion, and the religious challenge is a non-starter.

Or they might be super-aware beings, conscious to a higher degree than ourselves. If it is only a matter of degree, and they are of the same order of consciousness, (self aware and all that), genuine meeting shouldn't be a problem, even if we find them a trifle baffling. They, on the other hand, should comprehend us nicely, which might justify some apprehension, unless you trust that the more one knows about oneself, the more one is prepared to make allowances for the follies of others.

These two alternatives are conceivable, but once we start talking about some sort of disembodied,

angelic race, we're into a different league altogether, and not relevant to the question of religion, which is a material phenomenon. It may deal with the invisible, but it works through the visible. So long as we ourselves have a physical existence, it seems to me that our biggest challenge will be meeting extra-planetary beings of a roughly comparable type and stage of consciousness as ourselves.

As for the existence of some completely 'other' type of consciousness; well, if I can't conceive of it, I can't talk about it.

There would appear to be a high probability of comparable life-forms existing somewhere in the vast cities of this and other galaxies. But if contact were to occur tomorrow, would we be ready for it?

Back in October 1992 the SETI project was launched as a concerted search for intelligent signals from space. The project, and the publicity given to it, is beginning to prepare us all. Once the psychological landscape is prepared, we are not only more likely to be able to handle any dramatic discoveries when they happen, but are more likely to be receptive and detect them. Perhaps we are actually tuning our receptivity with more than just telescopic dishes?

Preparing the Ground

The whole question of emotional preparedness is very important, an insurance against freaking out or throwing up instant blocks. As anyone who has done any proper self-observation will know, it is all too easy to block out what we do not want to acknowledge; sometimes in the face of very material facts.

So I think it is in our interest to be prepared, conceptually and emotionally, (which you could say is one of the objectives of this lecture series). The urge to go into space is not likely to go away because it is serving a deeper drive, even if the purse-strings are tightened from time to time. As earlier suggested, if there is to be any further human evolution, we may need the challenging conditions of space to initiate it.

Across the western world the Zeitgeist is despairing introversion, gloomy turning in on ourselves, depression, perhaps reflected in recession rather than the other way about. From a point where you could view mankind as a whole (Man's Stationary Earth Orbit, or MEO), it looks remarkably like the moodiness of an adolescent, just before he mobilizes his critical and rebellious energy and gets out of

the home which has now become too small and restrictive. A young person needs to test himself against a wider sphere, to establish his own identity on his own terms. It isn't just a flight from problems, but a response to a natural need to establish an independent identity and to grow in experience.

The drive towards space can be seen in the same terms. There may be problems at home, but if, as a maturing planetary civilization, there is a drive from inside pushing us into the uncharted realms outside the secure and familiar, eventually, we will go, despite qualms, starving of funds, moral scruples, reasoned arguments and the like. Many parent has tried these out in vain; if a kid's gotta go.....

It does look to me as if the cookie is crumbling relentlessly out into space. As for the maturity of the human race, you see what I see, and indeed it looks pretty horrible - covered in trouble-spots, ill-fitting institutions, seven-league trainers which promise to go places but end up hanging round the star-wars arcades. But I have seen gauche human larvae mature into reasonable, even fine human beings when the adult stage is reached, and I see no reason at all not to extend this law of growth and development to the human race as a whole. If the explosion of new abilities and energy, the turbulence, the search for direction, the outbursts of aggression and general emotional indulgence of the current age is part of a process of growth, the obvious parallel is adolescence.

When a young person leaves the parental nest, he or she often leaves the parental religion, too, if there is one, or at least re-examines it, as part of establishing his or her own values, appropriate to the circumstances in which he or she finds himself.

Religion in Revolution

When humanity enters the wider sphere of the galaxy, we can expect spiritual upheaval. Existing religions may need some re-adjustment where the eternal truths they proclaim are presented in earth-centred terms. For example, the obvious problem Christianity will have to address is the unique historical event of the birth and death of Christ, which is unrepeatable and took place on this earth. What about those on other worlds? Did Christ die for them too? Could He have been born, lived and died a number of times in different circumstances on other planets, just to keep the parity?

What will be the relevance of turning towards Mecca to pray in zero-gravity, or when earth is a dot among many in an ocean of stars?

Leaving the earth and going out into the expanses of space, seems to have a profound effect upon those who have experienced it. I gather that many of the American astronauts have subsequently turned to religion in one form or another. The psychological impact of looking back on earth from space - like seeing a loved home from far away for the first time – was clearly awesome and aroused emotion with religious feeling in them. But what if these men had not returned to familiar pastures: what about when there are communities established in space, where human beings live out their lives, or are born off the planet?

What religion will we set up in these communities? Shall we ship out a priest of every persuasion, and reproduce the religious strands of earth, or will we go for some collective merger, or an inter-faith compromise which pleases nobody?

Would any compromise or merger answer the deeper spiritual needs of an individual, especially if circumstances increase the experiential urgency of them? When religious feeling awakens as a powerful driving force you don't get polite inter-faith board-meetings with cerebral give-and-take and judicious cups of tea. You may get fanaticism, or zealotry, or rule by the most charismatic, none of which will lead to harmony in a closed off-world community. To restrain the unwisdom of personal zealotry, and to channel genuinely profound glimpses of meaning and the religious emotion that such seeing generates, we surely will need a wise and strong religious foundation, not a mish-mash.

It will be interesting to see which of the earth-based religions will cope best with the move into space and whether something new appropriate to a new base will arise.

I would be surprised if it did not, eventually (though it could take quite some time), because even in this age scientific/cosmological understanding and the religious are linked by being an 'ology' - ideology - and have an influence upon each other. It was more obvious in former days, for instance; consider how shocking and revolutionary was Galileo's proclamation that the earth revolves round the sun. The revolution was an internal one, in the psyche of the age. The so-called 'scientific' revolution was also a psycho-social revolution, culminating in our present technological status, and moral, ethical and spiritual crisis.

If SETI should hit the jackpot, I think there will be an upheaval with consequences quite as far-reaching as Galileo's discovery. It will bring into question our identity as humans, our status in the universe, our

state of development or maturity.

Faced with existential questions freshly minted from radical dislocation of the old answers, the hierarchies in charge of well-established religions may find themselves with an indigestible mouthful to chew. But chew they will, and my faith in human digestion is such that I am confident all sorts of doctrinal modifications will emerge faster than you can spit out an olive-stone.

Of course, what complicates any discussion of 'religion' is that when we use the word we might be thinking in terms of the institutional aspect, tied in with social structures, rank and privilege, authority, and jobs for the boys (and, occasionally, girls); or the spiritual, metaphysical side, where it connects with the inner experience of individuals. We might criticize one aspect, while acknowledging the validity of the other and there is a hazy area in between called dogma, which relates to spiritual experience but is defined and decreed by the authoritarian body.

The whole of a religious bureaucracy ultimately rests upon the integrity of its dogma and people's faith or belief in the truth of it. Adjusting the dogma to take account of other worlds in such a way that the whole belief system is not undermined will be a delicate and demanding task, and I think it will demand more than religious politics to come up with a satisfactory solution. It will require spiritual caliber, real disciplined insight into spiritual truths. Where a religious bureaucracy is dominated in its upper echelons by religious politicians (whether of the mild, well-intentioned or fanatical variety), I would expect a troublesome passage to the future.

For some religions it will be more difficult than for others. The broad sweep of ancient Vedic and Buddhist cosmology recognized other worlds beyond our own. But every religious body accustomed to thinking in terms of Homo Sapiens only, will need to reconsider the application of their teachings in the light of the existence of conscious beings different perhaps in shape, sensory organs, customs, morals and values.

We wince at the idea of alien sexual organs situated on what is to us the forehead, and at the passionate misunderstandings which might follow from our attempt to engage in social intercourse with such beings. For them ritual prostrations might not be a suitable form of prayer, and their religious iconography is likely to inspire us....well, differently. If material barter and trade with an alien race could be so fraught with the unknown, imagine the exchange of non-material goods!

The serious point is that not only should we examine what we may think of now as 'fundamental truths' to see how fundamental to conscious beings they really are, but some religious teaching will probably be irrelevant to other beings. We will have to re-examine our own assumptions about the nature of God and of fundamental principle.

The Matter of Faith

It sounds messy. It sounds destructive, but I think we're nudging our real and only hope for the future. It could be summed up as a matter of faith.

Belief in certain doctrines, and religious faith are not the same thing. Faith, per se, is not faith in formulations, but in what underlies them; in the ocean of possibilities and of meaning in which we may recognize the divine.

At this level, and at this level alone, I would expect an easy transition towards a wider metaphysical universe, in which we have our place. Almost unavoidably the territorial nature of authority and belief will lead to conflict. But anyone who has cultivated faith, whether in a religion or out of it, belongs already to the greater religious universe in which you and an oval-shaped creature with various unfamiliar appendages, could gaze into each other's eyes and know that you are both children of a common creator or creative spirit; that you both know truth; that you can both reach out from your physical cages to touch on something less limited, pervasive, and unifying.

Faith is not the preserve of any religion it transcends them. In Saros we might talk of knowledge, meaning something very close to 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...' Substance, not ideas or understanding, which can help faith but are not the same thing. With faith, the future is not a menacing product of human weakness; it is simply unknown, but filled with the potency which brought the universe into being.

Faith cannot share a bed with cynicism or pessimism; but neither does it espouse naive optimism. Clear-eyed Faith might be surprised, but is not likely to be fazed by gazing into alien organs of perception knowing that whatever the universe turns up is evidence of the invisible. If more of us understood this relationship, or took it on faith, we might worry less about our survival as human beings in the extended landscape of space.

There is a precursor to faith, something perhaps more accessible, easier to cultivate, and that is simply an attitude of mind. Practical DIY in the mind-frame department doesn't require illumined wisdom: just a little faith in the human spirit, a spirit which itself belongs to a bigger order of things.

Zero-Gravity

Anyway, let's return to the heart-to-heart you are enjoying with this ovoid individual, in zero-gravity. The concept of zero-gravity lends itself to interesting symbolism. You can see the gravitational field of a planet as a physical aspect of the force binding living beings to their biosphere. The planet itself is central. It is all-important to the beings upon it, who take their bigger identity from it.

When Galileo pointed out that earth is not the centre of the universe, it parallels a process whereby a young child gradually learns that its wants and its views are not the centre around which the household revolves. A hard lesson: I expect it to take me a lifetime. But I do know that there is a set-up bigger than my own personal cosmos, so on the macrocosmic scale too, I am resigned to recognizing that even our Sun, that grand and beneficent provider of life on earth, is nowhere near the centre of the universe either. There is a bigger status quo, a bigger centre, to which I owe some degree of allegiance. I belong to this earth, but I also belong to this solar system and this galaxy. My galactic identity makes me part of the largest order, one I don't know very much about. I will have to be educated before I can accept it easily and see what it means'

Our collective mind-frame at present is dominated by 'earth-centrism'. The greater universe out there is for most of us a two-dimensional irrelevance to the business of fulfilling our wants and views.

It is a bit like astronomers gazing at a faint dot at the end of their telescope, a mere pretty image on lens and retina - until it comes close enough to reveal that it's bristling with sensory apparatus, armaments and grinning sentient faces! At which point world leaders will snatch the telescope and..... you can probably sketch in the rest yourself.

Not just a diverting fantasy, I suspect it will take a jolt of this nature, or increasing education and ease with the sphere outside earth's gravity (a process which is well under way) to dislodge the ideological blinkers of geo-centrism. Zero-gravity is a symbol for independence from home; independence of thought and belief; emotional independence and maturity. True mastery of zero-gravity will allow us to enter the gravitational fields of other large planetary bodies, even live within them and learn from

interacting with them without being taken over, cowed, seduced or absorbed by them.

It's called maturity. Whether on the scale of planets or people, the ability to operate and co-operate within the 'gravity fields' of other bodies and retain our, own integrity is a facility which comes with maturity. If it is a natural human stage of growth on the personal scale it must be natural and possible also on the collective and macrocosmic. Maturity for the human race might not require turning our back on home, only that we *can* leave, enter many homes and establish dialogue and relationship with whatever is found there.

Symbols of Maturity

Maturity could give us a different view of religion too. There is an ecological emphasis on Mother Earth, Gaia, the Goddess. We may be witnessing the beginning of a new Mythology reflecting a new global situation, but when I hear Mother Earth .reverenced-as a deity to be-placated and patronized, I want to ask who then is our Father? What is the opposite equivalent?

Clearly we will get no new life without both, no continuance without the perpetual insemination of the mother by the father. Even if at present we insist on being a one-parent family, I think some day we will want to know and acknowledge our other progenitor, and it will be one more step towards developing the mythology of a new metaphysic, and eventually, perhaps, a new religion.

To date there have been a number of father gods: our Heavenly Father, Zeus, Brahman, a variety of sky gods, the Ancient of Days and so forth.. Father imagery is spatial and expansive, as Gaia is concentrated and earthy. The dilemma I see approaching is whether any of these various representations can match the *universality* of Gaia.

Because Gaia' unlike the others which are cultural, is a pan-global concept, created by the vision of the earth from space. This vision crystallized a perspective which is new in the history of humankind. It opened the possibility of an overview; for instance vis-a-vis religion, of seeing each as a strand in the total picture of the religious life of humanity. However attached you may be to one of these .strands, other people are equally attached to theirs, and from a vantage point outside earth's gravity, they make up a rich tapestry, Gaia's religious tapestry, part of her fertile matrix.

Again the question: what external force fertilizes her? What galactic, universal, multiversal creative

force spread its super-abundance across the many matrices of the observable universe, and seeded life and awareness wherever this has occurred?

Or,-what fragment, what Son of such Endlessness might we dare claim as Father to our humanity here on this earth?

My point is, that we may have to re-define it. The fathering images we have already are specific, culturally and historically. There are too many of them, and none of them have the global acceptance of Gaia. Zero-gravity may promote the need for a single collective concept, springing from the imperative of the overview. This could be the genesis of a global religion.

However, a global religion which avoids anthropomorphism might leave us in a better position to resonate with our Unfamiliar Friend, whose people might also conceive the deity in their own image. If we and they, as races and as individuals, are sophisticated enough in our religious understanding to penetrate the reality beyond images (as the first commandment bids us do), we might achieve a state of brotherhood, and recognize a common creative source.

So far, so good: We embrace the Tentacular Personage as an equal, a brother, but let us say that the next stage involves longer-term co-operation, and practical steps need to be taken like erecting a building to serve us all, or training up a class of religious advisers to minister to the needs of the multitude. Then the fun would really begin. A more detailed metaphysic than simple brotherhood could be forced into existence.

If it came to building, even as a symbol, a structure to accommodate the religious aspiration of this galaxy and its residents, how would we go about it? Traditionally, religious buildings on earth have been constructed on sacred principles. They reflect some sort of metaphysic in their structure. (The little brick box with angular turret erected in the 60's at the corner of your local housing estate does not do this. You might like to argue among yourselves as to whether this is likely to affect the quality of the activities taking place in it.)

One suggestion for a galactic sacred edifice, albeit rather a gross solution (resorting to morphology rather than metaphysical principle) might be a roundish or elliptical structure with long spiral arms. You could allocate space along the arms for various races' own devotional practices.

However, a nice Oecumenical compromise like this is begging a big question:

What will we put at the centre?

Nothing? Leave it empty, symbolic of going beyond form? It would be a useful cop-out, for I suspect it would be symbolic of simply not knowing, reflecting a situation in which the basis of real community and shared understanding is not being met. Separate religions and races holding to their separateness would not constitute a greater communion, united by a common understanding and vision.

Galactic Identity

It seems to me that the great leap involved in our venturing into the space and worlds of the galaxy is that we are again making a shift of identification and scale, taking account of the galactic centre around which our solar system revolves. Each shift represents a stage of growth, each locus enabling a bigger perspective on our real situation, and simultaneously opening new possibilities. The gravitational field to which we are subject becomes wider, less binding; we have more freedom of movement.

This latest shift would make the centre of the galaxy extremely significant for the future, its characteristics being woven into a new symbolism perhaps, or standing for a new stage of spiritual awareness.

Astronomically speaking, I believe it is not entirely certain what is at the centre of our galaxy. It is likely to be a black hole, which is mysterious and utterly awe-inspiring. I would imagine that the view out from the centre would be a dazzling field of light, the massed star-fields of the galaxy in all directions. Look inward to darkness; look outward to a universe of light. Already that is meaningful.

Bit by bit we are starting to become aware that we owe our existence and our position in space to the vast field of the galaxy, and the forces within it which maintain each separate family of stars and planets. We are all part of its mighty life, purpose unknown, beingness unknown.

So what sort of psychological symbol is this? - That it is unknown, but of a magnitude, power and distance which is overwhelmingly awesome?

The sun seems like a friendly little fellow by comparison, smiling at us from our children's drawings, bathing our bodies with its warming rays on the beach at Bognor, tip-toeing in the window at morn to say 'Wakey-wakey!' However, contemporary children increasingly disport themselves for hours in the

theatre of the galaxy through video-games.

Earth is too small a stage for all the possibilities of zapping, transporting and transforming which hover on the border of fiction and fact, virtual and actual reality.

Yet the unknownness of the galactic core also corresponds to something at the core of our own being - something which is religious, numinous, potent, awesome, but unknown in an intellectual sense, or even an emotional sense. It is knowable, but always beyond definition, circumscription, or the attempt to manipulate it. Experiencing it, we call it divine.

What we are doing by bringing the galaxy within range in everyday language, in children's games, in advertising, (Have you tried a Galaxy Bar? Out of this world was it?), is familiarizing ourselves with this reference point. Unconsciously, we are seeing ourselves in a galactic context, acknowledging it. We are preparing a symbolic vehicle. With it the Divine, or our awareness of the Divine, could be re-focused, crystallized afresh.

The Galactic Temple

Best of all, the galactic centre as a symbol would be equally valid for us and for any other planetary world in the Milky Way. It is indisputably a common point of reference for us all. Mythologically, the god of the centre of the galaxy is my God and their God too. Nothing to fight about. Every reason to set up a shared place of worship, and cement the powerful bond created by sharing the same religion.

However, we are a long way, spatially and temporally, from joining forces with alien civilizations to construct a galactic temple. Such a fantasy is still in the realms of science fiction.

We are nearer though, if you look at it mythologically. The temple I have in mind isn't a physical structure; not yet anyway. I am postulating a temple not made with hands, a spiritual communion which is not dependent upon NASA for entry. Evolved beings on this planet are as likely to belong as those of any other. By 'temple' I mean a sacred space, a place where one can commune with the Divine. Each of us does have access to such a place within if we want it, although many of us may have forgotten it, mislaid the key to the door, or attempted to fill it with jumble. Armed with the key, and prepared to do a little work clearing and maintaining, we have a point of contact with what is beyond ourselves. If there are any other conscious beings out there, I'd guess that they would have access in the same way.

There is the Temple.

It should be clear by now that my interest in all these matters is not so much with the galaxy as a physical arrangement of dense bodies in space, nor the technological hardware for probing and travelling around in it, as with the metaphor provided by space. I see this metaphor as a living relationship between the outer world and the inner. Without meaning there is nothing to live for. To keep going we make things meaningful: career, family, relationships, music, Japanese fighting-fish, any number of things. But spiritual aspiration is hard to talk about non-material realities difficult to gasp. Inner experience needs a language, which religious symbolism provides.

I look at the new territory humanity is extending into, and everywhere I see language; new pan-cultural imagery for experience. The space-age is a new religious age, which I do not see as a mishmash or welding together of existing religions into a compromise which will offend neither Jew, Christian, Muslim and so forth, but as a forging of something appropriate to an unprecedented situation. It may be essential in the future to have a strong religious identity as Homo Sapiens for the spiritual health of those who have left the earthly nest, or indeed have never known it, and do not have roots in the soil of Earth.

Suppose there were some day a galactic synod or religious symposium which requested a single representative or spokesperson from Earth. Who would we send?

One day perhaps there will be vehicles with anti-matter drives nipping back and forth to Alpha-Centauri, but telecommunication signals will have established contact long before that. Even now we are projecting awareness very far into space, not only with probes but through satellite transmissions. Something of our field of consciousness is extending into the field of the galaxy, and interacting. With what results I wonder?

The conscious field is something we create through mental and emotional functioning. It's parallel to the physical life-field we call the biosphere, so could be called the 'psychosphere'. It would include every product of conceptual and emotional life, and extend as far as our greatest aspirations reach. Like the biosphere, all kinds of interactions must take place within it, rhythms and flows and obedience to certain laws.

The more organized a field is, the stronger it is. I see the human psychosphere reaching out into space

right now, rather weakly it is true, but gaining in strength with every physical projection: probe, beam, vehicle. These visible manifestations crystallize out of the world of thought and idea, but in turn they concretize a foundation for further speculation and ideas.

Organizing a psychological field must involve emotional forces too. All the work we do aimed at psychological growth must be contributing in some way to the collective field.

So a final thought about inter-space communication: if morphic resonance is a reality, why expect that it operates only on this planet? Distance doesn't seem to be a factor, and ideas and events appear to occur spontaneously in widely distant locations. They arise in the psychosphere and are given physical shape. So if the human psychosphere is wider in extent now than ever before, then as we turn our awareness to worlds beyond our own, perhaps it is overlapping the psychosphere of other beings who are doing the same, extending their conscious field further than ever before? What we are devising here might be simultaneously taking shape somewhere else, and the question of who thought of it first could be rather academic. Might our development be interlinked, parallel with other conscious beings of a similar stage of development?

It sure adds a new dimension to the 'space-race'! I can just see us blasting off for Alpha-Centauri in the latest feat of technology, only to pass a similar craft heading the other way!

I conclude with another thought closer to the heart of Saros. Do you think that somewhere out there might be a door over which is inscribed the words: ET, Know Thyself?

Within, otherly-constituted beings might be meeting in groups and organizing lecture-series. They also might have devised a philosophical framework to understand the laws of their own nature and to see it in relation to a bigger order of creation, and they too may have undertaken those practices which are the necessary technology for entering the inner regions of space - exercises, meditation, prayer and so forth'

I wouldn't hazard a guess about their cellular structure, but I'd stake my reputation on the likelihood that the force of galactic darkness will be in them too, and the radiance of a million suns be in their make-up, and the power which holds the universe in being, will also in them unite the great contraries, and preserve their integrity as individual creatures.

In which case, these distant colleagues may find their way to the same Temple round about the time we do.

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