



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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Summer 2005  
Volume 5, Issue 14

## Nature Deficit Disorder

By Maurice Lange, OMI

Recently on National Public Radio, there was an interview with an author regarding children and their insulation from the natural world: Richard Louv who wrote the book "*Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*".<sup>1</sup> An intriguing diagnosis: Nature Deficit Disorder. Upon pondering this collection of words and the illness it refers to, one may recognize that it is not only children who are suffering from this disorder. Indeed, the vast majority of our entire Western society has become alienated from the very system that sustains us.

Human activities that flow from such alienation result in human suffering (such as diseases linked to toxic air, water and food). This alienation in our consciousness also causes suffering for *other-than-human* species: innumerable animals and plants. *Can we even image God suffering* at the dualism humans have erected between themselves and the rest of Creation?

This high degree of separation out of the natural world is something extremely new. For the vast majority of 2+ million years of human existence on Earth, humanity was consciously, physically and spiritually enmeshed within nature. (Our bodily makeup, including the very elements in our bones, is the result of a 13 billion year process of Universe and Earth becoming. As Creation is indeed ongoing, this sacred story of the interconnectedness of Creation continues to unfold.) Our ancestors told such stories of relatedness: of how humans fit into the rest of Creation. They knew that we are intrinsically linked to nature. They recognized that we *are* nature.

And yet very recently western humans have become entranced into a vision that Thomas Berry calls *wonderworld*.<sup>2</sup> This world promises to, in the midst of our lifetimes, deliver us from the limits and boundaries which Nature demands. One clear example of this would be the genetic manipulation of organisms: the genetic sequences of plants and animals (these

species which have taken millions of years of evolutionary time to arrive at their current state and which would never cross genes in the natural world) are being manipulated so that a trait of one species will be introduced into another: i.e. - inserting the genes of flounder into tomatoes. At the heart of such a cultural trance is a cosmology that envisions the natural world as not much more than a collection of unrefined goods intended for consumer use. "Untamed"

places, for instance, are regarded as having no deep inner meaning in and of themselves. Such places are not considered revelatory.

And when lifestyles and societies are created out of such deeply held cultural beliefs, our children have no other frame of reference. Thus, our youngest greatly suffer that which the culture both believes in and ultimately suffers from.

Distinguished biologist Edward O. Wilson has documented the far-reaching effects of such perceived separation of humans from nature. His astute observations have helped some to become aware of the current and highly accelerated rate of extinction of species. Yes, extinction is natural, but not at the present rate exacerbated by human activity. Wilson goes beyond numbers that are indeed dire



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## Letter from the Director

Ah, Summer! Perhaps this time of year connotes abundant gardens, a well-deserved vacation, or even extra daylight to spend long evenings with family and friends.

As I write this in early Summer, we are in the midst of hot weather...and a drought. Our ground is uncharacteristically dry for this time of year, not a favorable position to be in heading into August! Never-the-less our farmer Amy Cloud and her assistants Trisha Grimm and Amy Gerth are able to bring forth wonderful harvests from the ***Community Supported Garden at La Vista***. 120 families are shareholders in this, the project's third season. We look forward to each weekly harvest and to a fun gathering in early August when shareholders will gather and bring creative seasonal dishes to sample during the height of tomato season. See photos of the Garden at [www.lavistacsa.org](http://www.lavistacsa.org)

So too the ***La Vista Ecological Learning Center*** is reaping what we have sown with a special program this late-July: "Earth Literacy Re-Visited". This is a gathering for any of the 37 alumni from our weeklong Earth Literacy programs over the last 3 summers. The "Re-Visited" weekend should be inspiring as we learn from each other and continue to learn from Earth. Besides that, we have 20 folks (capacity) signed-up as first-time Earth Literacy week long participants this August 3-10.

In the Spring issue of *La Vista Visions*, noted scripture scholar Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA wrote poignantly about the Integrity of Creation as the basis for contemporary theology and spirituality. We received much positive response from that feature article. If you wish an extra copy of this issue, they are available...just let me know.

I failed to mention in that last issue about the addition of our new administrative assistant Stacy Hall. Stacy very quickly

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learned the mystery of PageMaker and produced the Spring *La Vista Visions* issue as well as this one. Stacy, her husband and 4 children live in nearby Dow, IL on a small-family farm.

Stacy and her family are the rare exception. Since part of their income stems from their farm, they are intimately and consciously tied to Nature. *Most Western people are not!* As we are encouraged by the second Vatican Council to ponder the signs of the times, this reality surely is one that has far-reaching implications. May the lead article in this issue invite you to deeper awareness, hopefully prompt further reflection and motivate creative resolution.

Here on the bluffs in Godfrey, Illinois this Summer marks a watershed point for the Oblate Ecological Initiative. This ministry formally began in December, 2001 and this June marked the end of a trial-period initially set forth by the Oblates. During this time over 18,000 people have been reached directly through both the on- and off-site ministry of the *Learning Center* as well as those participating in the *Community Supported Garden*. It is hard to say how many others have learned from us through television, radio, magazine, video, newspaper articles and a documentary. Final numbers are best left up to Mystery! Suffice it to say that the work has been good, very good, and plenty! We look forward to both being and working from here for years to come.

Summer has arrived! May the Great Work you are involved in, to build a mutually-enhancing human/Earth relationship, continue to evoke within others both a larger perspective and broader compassion! ☯

- Maurice Lange, OMI

The beauty of the trees,  
the softness of the air,  
the fragrance of the grass,  
speaks to me.

The summit of the mountain,  
the thunder of the sky,  
the rhythm of the sea,  
speaks to me.

The strength of fire,  
the taste of salmon,  
the trail of the sun,  
and the life that never goes away,  
they speak to me.

And my heart soars.

Chief Dan George

The faintness of the stars,  
the freshness of the morning,  
the dewdrop on the flower,  
speaks to me.



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## The Sacredness of Land

By Maurice Lange, OMI

This morning I woke up early and walked to the spot I most associate with “*La Vista*”. It is just beside our Oblate house here on the bluffs in Southwestern Illinois. This place and these bluffs afford a most breathtaking view of the mile-wide *Mississippi* River below and the Missouri floodplain beyond. At it was a refreshingly cool morning, steam was whispering up off the river and pockets of fog snaked across the floodplain. Summer birds were singing their morning song. The first rays of the sun inched over and beyond the view.

Can land be considered “sacred”? Is Creation “revelatory”? I think that early morning experiences such as this helped infuse the life of earlier peoples with deep meaning.

I think of other places where a vista provides a context for a broadened vision. *Tepotzlan*, near Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico is both a small mountain and a village at its base. The two-hour journey of climbing *Tepotzlan* makes me think of the journey of life itself. Placing my hands and feet upon the same steep trail that indigenous peoples journeyed on their way to the top gives me a sense of oneness. And then, arrival! The scene from the precipice helps me to see why ancient peoples worshiped here: A thunderstorm brewing way off in the distance, fertile fields in the foreground. I’m sitting on a small pyramid that was constructed with their hands. Why did they build it?

Wendell Berry has said “You can’t know who you are until you know where you are”. Well, where am I?

I come back now to this bioregion and ponder *Cahokia*. This largest gathering of Indigenous mounds north of Mexico lies 15 miles from where I write. Why did thousands of people gather there 1,200 years ago? What inspired these Indigenous to the Great Work of building over 120 mounds with the largest being 100 feet tall? What vistas were present from that place, that effort, the tops of those mounds? I ponder the native’s deep intuition of Berry’s words as they

The first of a two part series on the preservation of the Land known as *La Vista*.

lived intimately with a sense of place—and thus intimately with the “who” of their lives.

Three great rivers come together in this bioregion. Just upriver from La Vista the *Illinois* joins the *Mississippi*. Just downriver from this perch on the bluffs the *Missouri* flows in. And the *Mississippi* becomes mightier. That coming together of waters allured native peoples to join together as well.



This is where I find myself..

This place opens me to ponder the Native Americans and their vision quest—a kind of “novitiate”. I try to be mindful of those who once worshipped on these very bluffs.

Close to here, near the confluence of the *Illinois* and the *Mississippi*, Pere Marquette State Park is an amazing place. Burial mounds are found on those bluffs. I can’t help but intuit that earlier peoples were also buried on the bluffs here at *La Vista*. In fact just below our lodge, there once existed petroglyphs—indigenous rock drawings. Why would someone choose places such as this to draw? Why would people bury their dead on bluffs with a sweeping view?

Modern humans need relatively undisturbed places such as this. If this current culture is to embrace a broader vision than “the meaning of life is to get stuff”, places and spaces that evoke that which lies deep within the human are critically necessary. This is to say nothing of the need for habitat and security of other-than-human creatures.

The foresight of the Oblates, especially Bob Moosebrugger and David Kallert in working with the local *Great Rivers Land Trust* to retire the development rights of *La Vista*, is prophetic. Can we imagine the gratefulness of future generations of many species for preserving the sacredness of this land and the revelation it provides?





# Worldviews Unfolding

By John E. Surette, SJ

*In workshops conducted by the Spiritearth staff we sometimes invite participants to recall the stories that were told during their early years that influenced their understanding of the world around them, that helped formulate their worldviews. What follows is my own personal response to this invitation. Does it resonate somewhat with your experience?*

I grew up in the city. I knew that eggs came from hens, milk from cows, and meat from animals. I think that I learned these things mainly from children's picture books. I also learned that there was something magical about Earth from hearing fairy tales, from playing in the snow in winter, from going to the beach in summer, and from enjoying lightning and thunderstorms.

At an early age I knew from family and church that God made me. I didn't know how everything else came to be as it is. I first experienced the terror and power of the natural world when the hurricane of 1938 cut its destructive path through the New England states. A large tree blew down in our yard and it took me the entire next day to cut through it's bark with my toy tin saw.

I was ten years old when we dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. Despite all the government's propaganda, which I studied in great detail, I intuitively knew that we humans had the power to destroy ourselves and to radically disrupt Earth's community of life.



*The author at age 15*

## A Hierarchical Worldview

By the age of twelve I had learned the Genesis origin story from the Bible and had assimilated the view that Earth was hierarchically ordered. God was on top of the pyramid with angels, men, women, and children beneath. Under us were animals, plants, and rocks. We had souls, they didn't. We were the spiritual ones, they were not. This view located the Divine above Earth. Humanity, which alone was in the image and likeness of the Divine, was also above, separate, and not really connected to the rest of creation. I identified with what was above me on the pyramid. What was below simply did not matter much. It was merely the background against which I did my human thing. Looking back upon and analyzing this view and experience, it was radically anthropocentric. It devalued what was non-human. It was an anti-ecological worldview.

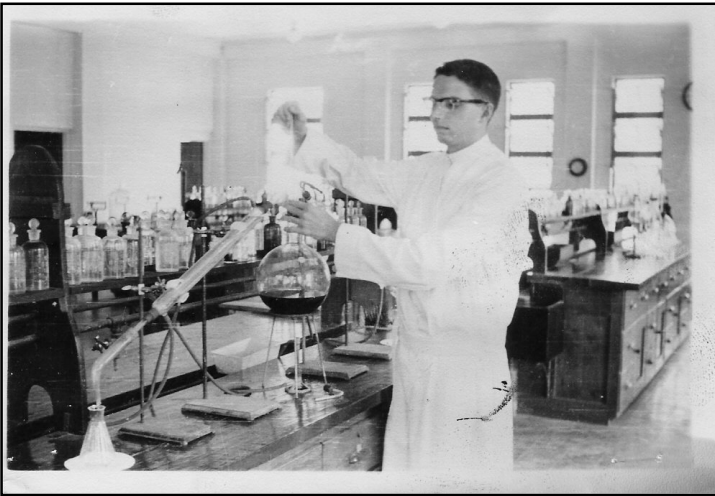
## A Materialist Worldview

At the age of eighteen I graduated from high school where I studied a lot of science. By this time I had fully assimilated another worldview, one in which Earth was a material reality. Above it somewhere there existed a spiritual realm where the Divine resided. In this view Earth was just "stuff." It was composed of crass matter. It had no spiritual aspect. It possessed no integrity, no voice, and carried no Mystery. Accordingly, it made no demands on us. It was merely a collection of objects. Its value was purely utilitarian. Our human destiny was to control it. Our success in exercising this control became a measure of how "civilized" and "advanced" and "developed" we were. Earth was a resource, which at best we used and at worst we destroyed. Looking back and analyzing this review and experience, it devalued the Universe. It too was anti-ecological.

During my college years I was gifted with some powerful experiences of the cosmos while in the mountains and lake region of New Hampshire. These events affected me deeply. I even wrote some poems about them. The Universe however, continued to be an object "out there" before which I stood in awe and reverence. It was not "in here." There continued to be a gap, alienation, between myself and the natural world.

During my 20's I failed to take good care of my body. I did not experience it as a temple and as my most immediate connection with a sacred Earth. It was just a kind of instrument that I used to achieve my purposes. During this time I had studied biology and geology. I had a deep interest in the span of evolution and the fantast





*The Author in 1960  
St. George's College, Kingston, Jamaica*

knowledge, however, was in the realm of interesting scientific facts and had no deep personal meaning for my life. In my 30's and 40's I lived and worked in the Caribbean islands. I was caught up in the pathos of the human situation. My focus was on justice for the human community with little or no awareness of justice for the larger Earth community. Earth continued to be just the backdrop.

## An Ecological Worldview

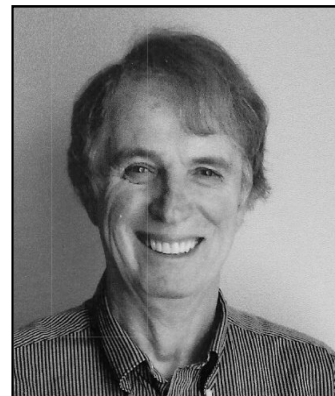
The two worldviews already described, like all worldviews, were deeply embedded inside of me. In my 50's however, they began to give way to something new. At first it happened on the intellectual level and then on the experiential. What I would describe as an ecological worldview was emerging within me. In this new view I discovered myself to be an Earthling whose thoughts and actions are as much of Earth as are the plants and the rocks. It moved me out of the destructive illusion that I resided outside of nature. It summoned me from a utilitarian stance before reality into a posture of identity and intimacy with the entire natural order of things. I was invited to think and act not in terms of domination and control but of cooperation and reciprocity in my relationships with Earth. My attention was focused on the interdependence of all living and non-living systems of our planet.

This ecological worldview is not anthropocentric but biocentric. The question becomes not so much whether any particular cause, issue, plan or program is good for the human community but whether it is good for the total community of life which includes the human. Humanity can no longer be saved without saving Earth. In this view Earth becomes not the background but the context of the human adventure. There can only be a viable human economy within Earth's economy, an effective human educational system if the Earth

first educates a human spirituality if there is an Earth spirituality.

This ecological worldview opens me up to the Sacred within everyone and everything. Earth has unfolded me. I cannot know my own story unless I know the Earth's story. What is unique and deepest in me has unfolded not above but within Earth. If I experience a spiritual dimension in myself today then Earth in its processes over time must contain a spiritual aspect. I have come into existence within a bio-spiritual planet. Earth is a sacred place and I am part of that sacredness. Both Earth and I activate a deep dimension of the universe, namely, its being a revelation of the Divine.

As so I personally have moved out of the illusion that I am separate from the rest of nature. There are moments and days when previous worldviews operate within me. On most days, however, it is liberating and meaningful to experience that I am in communion with all that exists and not trapped in some sort of discontinuity. Existence apart from community is an ontological impossibility. To be is to be related. Have not our mystics through the ages always taught this! ☯



*John Surette is a Jesuit Priest, Co-founder & Director of Spiritearth, editor of Spiritearth publication, Educator for an Ecozoic Consciousness & Student of Earth.*

*He says that what is most important in his life is listening to the Divine's foundational revelation – the Universe/Earth – and assisting others to listen. [www.spiritearthnet.org](http://www.spiritearthnet.org).*

*“Ecological Consciousness is the result of a psychological expansion of the narrowly encapsulated sense of self as isolated ego, through identification with all humans (species chauvinism), to finally an awareness of identification and interpenetration of self with ecosystem and biosphere.”*

—George S.



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*The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.*

-Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia*

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*(continued from pg 1)*

that which binds humans to the natural world. He coined the phrase “*biophilia*” – how humans have a real need for relationship with other parts of the natural world. Wilson has said “*we do have a love of or an affiliation for other organisms. The other species aren’t our species. We don’t exchange genes with them, but we have a common heritage... and they are the environment which produced us. And we may have an affiliation with them psychologically that we haven’t begun to understand.*”<sup>3</sup>

Another leading thinker who helps us to overcome false and dualistic notions of relationship with nature is Theodore Rozak. He is a professor of history and has assisted in creating the field of “*eco psychology*”. Rozak explains that “*at the lowest level, the deepest level of the unconscious mind we find an ecological unconscious, deeper down than Freud’s ideas about sexuality or Jung’s ideas of religious archetypes ....something that connects us intimately, companionably with the flora and fauna, the mountains, the rivers, the natural world around us.*”<sup>4</sup>



So too the late Pope John Paul II calls us as humans beyond ourselves and into the real world. He implores us to embrace our “‘*ecological vocation*’ which in our time has become more urgent then ever”<sup>5</sup>. Wow! “*Ecological vocation*”! Another broadening of a common understanding.

What is our call as a western society? Young and old we are all called to be healed from *nature deficit disorder*. Responding to the signs of our times, it appears that we, who are taking the time to read articles such as this, are being called to the role of ecological vocation directors 

#### Foot Notes

- 1 - To listen to an interview with Richard Louv go to [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).
- 2 - Thomas Berry, “*The Great Work*”, p. 68.
- 3 - Edward O. Wilson quoted in video “*The Unfolding Story*”.
- 4 - Theodore Rozak quoted in video “*Unfolding Story*”.
- 5 - Pope John Paul II “*Warning on Eve of World Summit on Development*”. August 25, 2002

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