



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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“The Cosmic Dance: Pain and Destruction”

by Joyce Rupp

The difficulty is that...we began to think of the universe as a collection of objects rather than as a communion of subjects. - Thomas Berry

As we get to know the sea, mountains, people, creatures and other inhabitants of Earth, we learn their stories, see where they have been weakened by illness and accidents, discover the pains they have endured in the storms and struggles of life and unexpected events. We learn that death is inevitable, no matter how closely and carefully people and nature are guarded and tended. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes occur because of climatic and seasonal changes. Animals and plants feed on one another in order to live. Everything ages and weakens. Life and death follow one another in a natural cycle, and from this cycle new life is eventually birthed.

However, a tremendous amount of pain and destruction is cruel and often preventable. Deaths, meaningless deaths, unwarranted deaths, careless deaths and deliberately callous deaths - they happen all the time. Humans do this to one another and they do this to their environment as well. Soil is washed away due to careless farming practices. Fish die because large factories pollute their waters with refuse. Birds and sea creatures struggle helplessly in huge spills of oil tankers. Limbs of orphaned children are blown to bits by land mines. Humans are lined up and murdered, their bodies thrown into mass graves. The priceless life of many is cut short, all because of attitudes and actions that hasten death and cause needless, excruciating suffering.

Humans have long thought of themselves as superior to the rest of creation and this thinking has promulgated a false sense of authority and dominance, creating the illusion that humans are “better than” and “apart from”, rather than intimately connected with the rest of life. Rachel Carson, who first awakened

society to the harm that humans were wreaking upon the land through pesticides, wrote: “The *control of nature* is a phrase conceived in arrogance born out of the Neanderthal age...when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man.”ⁱ

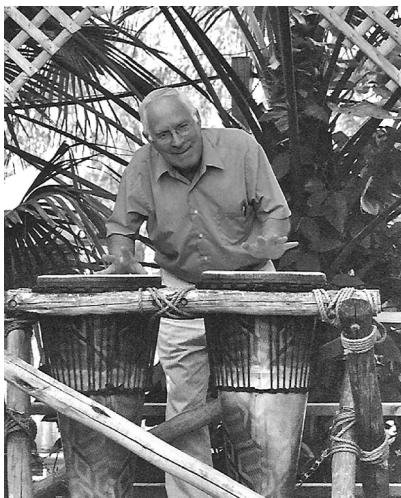


Thomas Berry observed that many humans see the world as a collection of things rather than as sacred sources of existence, as individual objects rather than as a part of one great organism in which the experience of each affects the life of all.ⁱⁱ Humans have become used to taking what they want from Earth without considering the consequences. Much of the unnecessary planetary pain today is caused by humans seeking their own convenience and comfort at the

expense of Earth. “Forget the trees, air, water, soil, and creatures,” human actions seem to say, “just let us have more shopping malls, larger houses, numerous electrical gadgets, wider highways, water fountains in desert cities...”

Something that has helped me in changing my own “dominance attitude” was learning how to “think like a mountain.”ⁱⁱⁱ With this approach, I discovered a way to enter into the life and death of nature by trying to “get inside,” what nature was experiencing. I did this by pausing and being present, thinking what it must be like to be a tree enduring many seasons and then quickly cut down, to be the sea with tons of garbage continually shoved into it, to be a mountain when the ancient stones and soil are roughly cut aside to form a road, to be an elk hunted and killed, to be a sea otter whose family faces extinction. When I began to think in this way, I

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The Oblate Ecological Initiative Remembers

Father Darrell Rupiper, OMI
March 7, 1937 - February 10, 2009

Father Darrell Rupiper, OMI, sowed the initial seeds that bore fruit as the Oblate Ecological Initiative (the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* and *La Vista Ecological Learning Center*).

Darrell recently passed away soon after receiving the shocking news of having leukemia. His death reminds us all too well that pain and destruction are an integral part of the *cosmic dance*.

Advocacy for the rights of the poor and marginalized and the Integrity of Creation were signatures of his life and ministry. All who sought his advice and support became life-long friends for whom Darrell cared deeply. Words cannot adequately express our affection for Darrell. Please join us in a prayer of gratitude for his wonderful life.

We thought our readers might benefit from reading Darrell's own words about awakening to his ecological vocation. Please go to our web site: www.lavistaelc.org, click on the *Newsletter* sidebar, then click on *Autumn, 2004*, and find his article and pictures on pages 4 and 5.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human / Earth Relationship

BOOKS

Thinking Like A Mountain – Towards a Council of All Beings by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Arne Naess and Pat Fleming, New Society Publishers, 1988.

Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, New Society Publishers, 1998.

WEB SITES

Center for Earth Jurisprudence: Re-envisioning law and governance from an Earth perspective. www.earthjuris.org/home

National Catholic Rural Life Conference: www.ncrlc.com Catholic Rural Life applies the teachings of Jesus for the betterment of rural America and care of God's creation.

MUSIC - CD

"At Night They Howl at the Moon: Environmental Songs for Kids" by Dana Lyons and John Seed.

(continued from page 1)

discovered a creation composed not of “things,” or “objects,” but of sacred companions with as much a right to live and exist as I have.

Because of my changed consciousness, I had a whole different awareness when I read about the grizzly bear’s struggle for survival and learned that these great bears have seen their habitat shrink to less than one percent of their former range. I could imagine their loss and hunger as they searched to find a



home and enough food for survival. I thought: “It’s like if I had been living in a huge estate and now had to live in a closet.”

Likewise, I understood the anguish in the voice of a farmer in Wales as she described her sorrow in having her whole herd of cows, three generations of Herefords, shot and killed at the time of the Foot and Mouth epidemic. With tears streaming down her cheeks she said she knew each of the cows by name and that even if she was blindfolded she would know them by touching their udders from her years of milking them. She knew they had to be killed because they were dying, the skin on their tongues and udders was falling off from the disease.

I understood her grief as well as the suffering of her cows because each part of Earth pains in its own way. All of life is sacred and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. When creatures and plants generously give their lives so that others might live, those who receive life from them need to do so with awareness and gratitude, remembering the sacrifice that has been made for them.

The pain of Earth and the destructive tendencies of humans are many and will not be easily solved. There are no quick solutions to the problems that exist. For example, how can we make a choice between large river dams that supply vast amounts of electricity and needed irrigation, and the destruction of habitat for millions of fish and other creatures that these dams create? How can we protect the Arctic coastal plains of Alaska, still untamed and rich with herds of caribou, wolves, bears, birds and

other wildlife, and also find a way to meet the need of fuel consumers by drilling intrusive oil wells in that area? Creative solutions to the many environmental dilemmas must be sought with unselfish compromise, with an attitude of what is best for ALL involved, always with an awareness of the oneness of life that we share.

We cannot go on as before, none of us. Each action we take has an influence on the rest of life on the planet. Nothing we do remains isolated. Each influences the other. It is a tremendous gift and also, an enormous challenge. As long as Earth remains an “it”, a “thing”, rather than a living, vibrant reservoir of life, humans will continue to use and abuse her. We need a loving relationship with this generous, vulnerable planet on which we live. Only then will we allow her songs of rich abundance to dance in the rhythms of our lives, only then will we respond with reverent care and live with daily gratitude. ☯

Endnotes

- i *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1962. P. 297
- ii *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, Thomas Berry. Bell Tower, New York: 1999.
- iii *Thinking Like a Mountain*, John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, Arne Naess. New Society Publ, PA., 1988.

This article was published in the spring, 2002 issue of *Catholic Rural Life*. It has been reprinted with permission of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. www.ncrlc.com

Joyce Rupp is well known for her work as writer, spiritual “midwife,” and retreat and conference speaker. A member of the Servite community, she has led retreats throughout North America, as well as Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Joyce is the author of numerous books, including *The Circle of Life: The Heart’s Journey Through the Seasons*, and *The Cosmic Dance: An Invitation to Experience Our Oneness*.

www.joycerupp.com.





Join us - Summer, 2009 Earth Literacy Program!



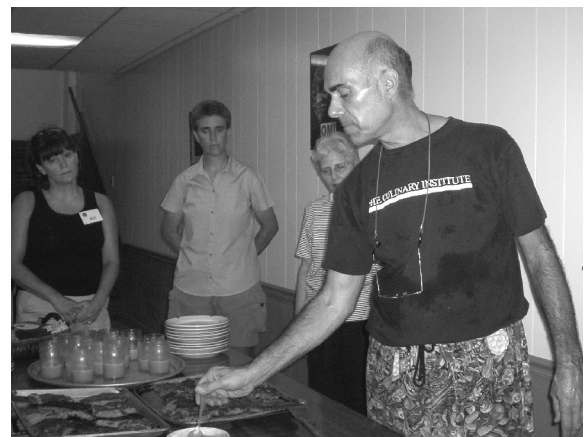
La Vista Ecological Learning Center invites you to explore the *Universe Story* on scenic bluffs overlooking the mile-wide Mississippi River in **Godfrey, Illinois** (near St. Louis, Missouri).

Come explore Creation's integrity for a week in a setting that invites you to **broaden your vision!**

Throughout the week we will:

- **participate** in guided activities and instruction
- **be immersed** in direct experience of the natural world
- **develop** practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life
- **contemplate** the wonder, awe, and newness of the Universe Story
- **critically examine** the perceptions that currently fashion our cultural world view
- **re-connect** to the Creator through Creation as we deepen our recognition of the inherent spiritual dimension of the Universe

Earth Literacy Program "Exploring the Sacred Universe"
August 3 – 10, 2009 \$550



Embracing a Shift in Consciousness

To address today's ecological crisis, we believe a foundational shift in perspective is essential – away from viewing Earth as a collection of individual objects toward embracing the Earth as a “living, vibrant reservoir of life”, as Joyce Rupp described it. We asked three of last year's Earth Literacy graduates to ponder how this shift in consciousness has affected their daily lives. Their reflections follow.

Lois Castillon, OSU, is Director of Ursuline Educational Services, networking 50 Ursuline schools and colleges in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.



“If you understand, things are just as they are. If you do not understand, things are just as they are.” This Zen saying haunts me. I want to make a difference. I felt changed after our “Earth Literacy Week” at LaVista.

My daily life is the same yet different. I have been sensitized to our earth and its vulnerability. Human I am but

no longer do I think of humans as central to the universe story; I am the universe becoming conscious of itself. I am new to the story. My perception is daily mixing with 100 trillion galaxies. I am a story within stories. We are new to Teilhard de Chardin's “complexification” of the universe story. I look at moon and stars, newly aware that I am stardust, and you are, too.

These haiku resonate with my growing awareness of creation's sacredness:

Eozoic era is
Now – our endowment needs our
Sustenance, concern.

~

Earth is primary,
Human is derivative -
Hard for me to take.

~

I need a sacred
Sensitivity, a new
Archetype, to LIVE!

Gail Battle, Chief Development Officer of Oblate Missionary Society, Inc.

Before I participated in the Earth Literacy retreat I never thought much about the spiritual dimension of the Universe. With my busy schedule, life was all about living for the day. Attending this retreat made me stop and reflect on who I am, the beauty

of God's creation and how I fit into this vast Universe. I learned so much from this experience, but I feel I need to attend the retreat again because there is still so much more to learn.

People always say “Stop and smell the roses”. I say, “Look to the stars and God will open your eyes to the beauty around and within you.” Thank God for creating the Universe for us and for providing the OMI Earth Literacy experience.




Cal Leopold, OSF, is pastoral associate at St. Rita Parish, West Allis, WI.

As I become aware of the “going green” movement, I wonder if society is readying itself for a paradigm shift in viewing and taking care of creation.

I am in the midst of such a conversion moment, and have been opening myself more and more to St. Francis' view of creation as “brother” and “sister.” This is much more than poetic license in Francis and in me. Relationality is a path of conversion calling out to me.

Growing awareness of the sacredness of creation has affected my prayer, food choices and ministry. I want to steep myself in the experience of working the land and being one with growing things. I am eating a more vegetarian diet. I am conscious of incorporating justice for the Earth into my parish ministry.

I'm aware that the values and rhythm of life of my grandparents on the farm are rooted in my center. Perhaps, for me, a paradigm shift to holding Earth and creation with reverence is merely a paradigm return on my spiral path of life. 





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A thing is right
when it
tends to preserve
the integrity, stability
and beauty
of the biotic community.
It is wrong
when it tends otherwise.

– Aldo Leopold

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Visit us at www.lavistaELC.org & www.lavistaCSA.org

*Excerpted from “The Origin, Differentiation and Role of Rights”
by Thomas Berry*

The universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not of objects to be exploited. As subjects, each component of the universe is capable of having rights.

- The natural world on the planet Earth gets its rights from the same source that humans get their rights, from the universe that brought them into being.
- Every component of the Earth community, both living and non-living, has three rights, the right to be, the right to habitat or a place to be, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing process of the Earth community
- All rights in living forms are species specific and limited. Birds have bird rights. Insects have insect rights. Humans have human rights. Difference of rights is qualitative not quantitative. The rights of an insect would be of no value to a tree or a fish.
- Human rights do not cancel out the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state.
- In a special manner humans have not only a need for but a right of access to the natural world, to provide not only the physical need of humans but also the wonder needed by human intelligence, the beauty needed by human imagination, and the intimacy needed by human emotions for personal fulfillment.

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

