



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Deepening the Adventure of Life

The Universe is a Green Dragon was written as a conversation between *Thomas* and a *Youth*. In the prologue to his book, Swimme explains that *Thomas* honors Thomas Berry and the cosmological tradition he celebrates, and *Youth* represents the human species as the youngest and newest species of all the advanced life forms on the planet. We have chosen this reading to celebrate the wisdom of Thomas Berry who died on June 1, 2009.

THOMAS: Why did life create forms that would become aware of their own individual deaths? Let's approach this question from the point of view of the emergent cosmos. The question then becomes, "What is gained for the unfolding cosmos to include particular creatures -humans- who are aware of their own deaths?" Why make us aware of our deaths? To deepen the adventure of life; to underscore the drama of each instant. The universe desires to show itself! The universe is a showing of the unnameable mystery out of which being shines forth. How else could the universe feel its own staggering value? How else, but through a human space aware of its own individual end? Within human self-reflexion can be felt a glimmer of the supreme preciousness of being, and we would certainly not be able to feel this were it not for our awareness of death...

YOUTH: I hate thinking I'll just disappear at death.

THOMAS: If you surprise the world with your life, the world will surprise you at death. Don't think of death as extinction; such uninspired speculations are simply much too prosaic to be true. Your dull imagination insults the very grandeur and staggering wonder of this universe. It's alright to be immature, but don't project your callow views upon the universe. Yesterday you knew nothing about the primeval fireball or the stunning dynamics of the star's unfolding, and yet you feel qualified to say that the universe was wrong in creating death?

Rather than hiding from your death, or repressing your fear

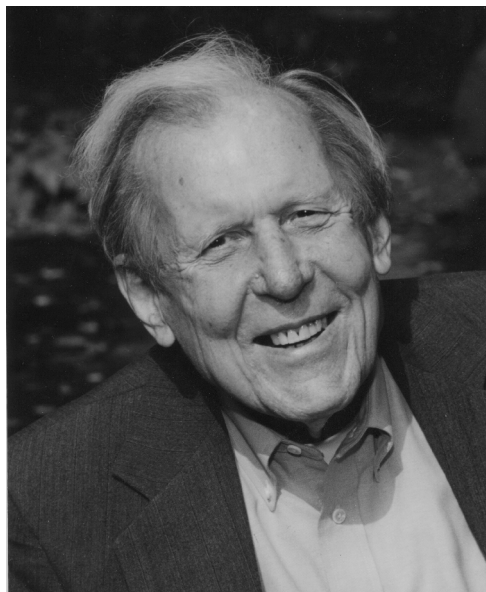
about death, embrace your death. It will serve you.

YOUTH: How?

THOMAS: By enabling you to show yourself. Precisely because you are aware of the limits of life, you are compelled to bring forth what is within you; this is the only time you have to show yourself. You can't hold back or hide in a cave; you can't waste away in a meaningless job, cramming your life with trivia; the drama of the cosmic story won't allow it. The supreme insistence of life is that you enter the adventure of creating yourself. Each instant of your life has folded into it unnameable significance; all rests on your self-creativity, for out of you comes forth ultimate reality. The dynamics that fashioned the stars are now brought into your self-reflexive awareness, and what they create is your free adventure, your surprise for the universe.

Yes: death is terrifying. Do not belittle it. Do not try to reduce this. Do

not project your puny ideas upon it. But use death's awareness as you would a fuel or a lamp: as a secret guide who will lead you into the unknown and mysterious caverns of your self so that you can bring forth what you truly are. Your creativity needs your awareness of death for its energy, just as your muscles need long and painful workouts. Cherish your awareness of death as a gift to you from the universe. If you did not have this way of seeing the infinite significance of each moment, would anything have the power to get you out



November 9, 1914 - June 1, 2009

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Letter from the Editor

What does Earth have to teach us about death and dying? Do our cultural attitudes toward death align us with the wisdom of Earth or are they out of sync with the natural movements of birth, life, death and resurrection?

Autumn is a good time for us to ponder death. We have only to walk among the trees, observing the leaves falling to the ground to learn a lesson about death and rebirth, about living sustainably in place. Not only does the outer world give rise to this issue's theme of death, but also our inner world, as we continue to mourn the loss of our mentor Thomas Berry who died in June as well as our dear friend, Bob Aaron, OM I, who died as we were preparing this newsletter. From the beginning of the Oblate Ecological Initiative, Thomas Berry's wisdom has informed our programs, our mission, and our philosophy; and from the beginning of our Earth Literacy program, Bob Aaron was on the staff, giving his all to help participants love the stars and planets as much as he did. We thought it fitting to dedicate this issue of *La Vista Visions* to them.

As I write this letter, *La Vista Ecological Learning Center's* eighth annual "Exploring the Sacred Universe" Earth Literacy program has just ended, and I'm sure that our eleven participants and seven presenters and staff will long remember this as the *coolest* literally and figuratively. We gloried in the moderate temperatures as creativity surged among our talented participants. Our presenters did an outstanding job of sharing the wisdom of the Earth and the story of the Universe as they encouraged a shift in worldview, away from "use" mentality and toward a mutually enhancing human/Earth relationship.

Autumn Equinox, 2009

Our unusually fine weather has also meant one fantastic season for the Community Supported Garden at La Vista. From the first share picked up in May, the bounty has been plentiful, varied and full of rich flavor. We owe our gratitude to Farmer Kris and his interns for the beautiful weekly harvests. It will be hard to surpass this 7th season, but we are already anticipating the tastes and pleasures of next summer's vegetables.

We are also looking forward to another round of seasonal celebrations, weekend retreats and next summer's Earth Literacy programs. Check out our calendar of events for details on these as well as for new offerings.

Thanks to you, our readers, for your continued support. May your living of this beautiful season of life be full of joy as you embrace the adventure of living.



Sister Maxine and Oblates during Earth Literacy 2009.

For *La Vista*,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

Do our current burial practices enhance the Earth as well as the human?

Natural burial provides us with the opportunity to give back to the earth some very small measure of the vast resources drawn from it in life, and so perpetuate the cycles of nature, of growth and decay, of death and rebirth, that sustain all of us. Recently, more cemeteries and funeral homes are offering eco-friendly burials that reduce their impact on Earth while giving loved ones a more active role in the conduct of the funeral. Components of natural burials may include:

- the opportunity to be buried without embalming (check the regulations in your area)
- biodegradable caskets without a concrete grave liner
- plots laid out around trees in a natural burial section
- headstones that are natural rocks rather than a polished headstone

Check out these resources that will help you explore alternative burial practices:

www.naturalburialcompany.com, www.greenburials.org, and

Grave Matters: A Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial,
by Mark Harris

The Cosmic Paradox

*"God did not make death
and does not delight in the
death of the living."*

Wisdom 1:13

All of us can tell the Garden of Eden story because we have heard it so many times. It is the story of God placing the woman and the man in a garden, in a paradise, that contained all that they would need to satisfy their human needs. Not content with what God had provided, they violated God's command and thereby brought eventual death upon themselves. In this story the woman and the man, not God, are the cause of death.

There is, however, another part of that same Garden story where we are told that we humans are made out of the dust of the Earth. Dust is a perishable substance and therefore as creatures of that dust we cannot avoid death and decay. So, it appears that the Creator of that dust does indeed intend that we who are made of that dust would perish. It appears that God does intend that we experience death.

This understanding that God does indeed intend that there be death is reinforced by the findings of modern science. It has been determined that our Sun, each second of its existence, burns up and transforms four million tons of itself into light, a small amount of which falls upon Earth.

Without that sunlight there would be little life, no you, and no me. Each second the Sun undergoes a dying or a Good Friday experience so that life might come forth on Earth, which is an Easter event.

Consider that rocks over time, when exposed to sun and wind and rain, erode and send their minerals into the soils, soils in which we grow our food. In their eroding the rocks undergo a Good Friday experience so that we might eat our mineral rich food that grows in those mineral rich soils, and live with enhanced health,



which is an Easter event.

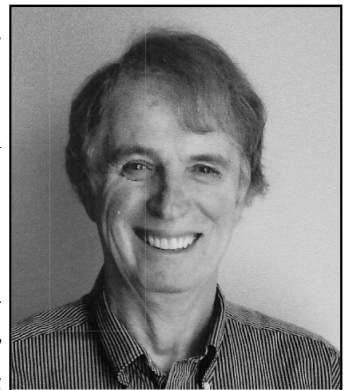
We die to a safe life within our mother's womb so that we can rise to a less safe but more exciting life outside. We die to the innocence of childhood so that we can rise to the challenges and excitement of adolescence. We die to the freedom of the single life so that we can rise to the creativity and companionship of family life. Parents die to their own legitimate needs so that their children can have a better life. Sooner or later we all will die to this life so as to enter the next one.

In all of this dying and rising, our Sun, the rocks, and we ourselves, are activating a deep dimension of God's Universe.

So, it seems that the author of the Book of Wisdom got it wrong. God does intend death, death that leads to greater life. God does intend Good Friday experiences that lead to Easter Sunday experiences. This is the cosmic paradox. May we embrace it! ☯

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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. His weekly homilies are available for you at www.csjthewell.org/SuretteHomileticReflections.htm



Reflections on Death, Our Intimate Companion



Mary Oliver

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

- from "When Death Comes"

Teilhard de Chardin

...After having perceived you as one who is "a greater myself," grant, when my hour comes, that I may recognize you under the species of each alien or hostile force that seems bent upon destroying or uprooting me."

"Bring me to a serene acceptance of that final phase of communion with you, in which I shall attain to possession of you by diminishing within you...to receive communion as I die is not sufficient; teach me to make a communion of death itself. For you bring new life out of every form of death."

- from The Divine Milieu

Rachel Carson

...“for when any living thing has come to the end of its life cycle we accept that end as natural. For the Monarch, that cycle is measured in a known span of months. For ourselves, the measure is something else, the span of which we cannot know. But the thought is the same: when the intangible cycle has run its course it is a natural and not unhappy thing that life comes to its end. That is what these brightly fluttering bits of life taught me this morning. I found a deep happiness in it— so I hope, may you.”

- from Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature by Linda Lear



Thomas Berry

“When asked about the separation of body and soul or spirit at death, he replied, ‘It is a total process, and the whole being is part of that process. Our disintegration [upon death] is the disintegration of a certain phase of a person’s being. But the whole life process is transcendent to a time process. Therefore birth and death are both contained in the reality of a person’s existence....’

So we are as old as the universe and as big as the universe. That is our Great Self. We survive [death] in our Great Self’.”

Quoted by Ann Berry Sommers in her eulogy at her uncle’s funeral.



"This week will expand your mind and spirit, your eating habits, your experiences, and your friendships!"



"Exploring the Sacred Universe"

**Earth Literacy
2009**



"I have been so deeply nourished - my soul renewed and refreshed and re-energized by the Story, the care of the staff and this sacred place at La Vista!"



"Everything has helped me to see more clearly the beauty of the universe and who I am - a human being who has a place in this Universe and a work to continue its existence."



(continued from page one)
there to live your life?

What is especially exciting about our own time is the vision of the death of the species, and of the planet as a whole. Frightening, terrible, horrible – yes, certainly. But this is exactly what has the power to ignite the deepest riches within us. We can no longer live within the previous world-picture. We know that we have to do something, create and change is the essential dimension of things. The terrifying vision of an Earth gone black is psychic food for the human species. It brings us the energy that we need to re-invent ourselves as the mind and heart of the planet. We now take our first steps into the planetary and cosmic dimensions of being, moving out of the anthropocentric modern period and into the cosmocentric, unfolding universe.

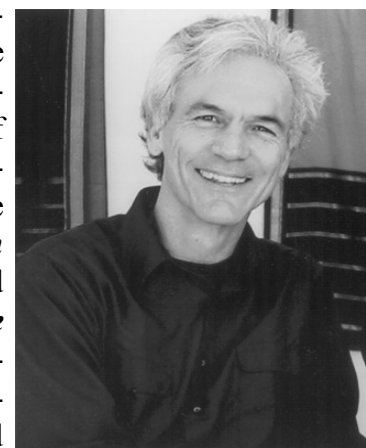
YOUTH: But what does it mean to become the mind and heart of the planet?

THOMAS: To live in an awareness that the powers that created the Earth reflect on themselves through us. That's why we are discussing the night sky, the sea, and the land. Each of these reveals cosmic powers that we are to have and become. We are to live as alluring and remembering activity, as shimmering sensi-

tivity. And this means the cosmic dynamic revealed by life forms: surprise and adventure. Call it play; adventurous and surprising play. That's what life reveals; that's what life is. ©

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Brian Swimme is a mathematical cosmologist on the graduate faculty of the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Swimme is also the author of *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* and co-author of *The Universe Story*, which is the culmination of a ten-year collaboration with his mentor and friend, Thomas Berry.





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**Do not
seek death.
Death
will find you.
But seek
the road
which makes
death
a fulfillment.**
-Dag Hammarskjold

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

The Oblate Ecological Initiative Remembers

Father Robert Aaron, OMI
October 8, 1939 - August 17, 2009

Father Bob Aaron, OMI, was a faithful friend and loyal supporter of the Oblate Ecological Initiative since its beginning in 2002.

Bob died unexpectedly in his sleep just one week after completing his eighth Earth Literacy program. As a presenter, he creatively shared with participants his love of the stars, planets and galaxies. Each summer he shepherded the staff and participants into the bluff pasture for a memorable evening of stargazing. Using his wonderful telescope, he opened us to the awesomeness of Jupiter and its moons, to Vega, the Southern Cross, and the Summer Triangle. We will deeply miss his gentle presence and clever presentations.

In his full-time ministry Bob was an experienced retreat director and spiritual guide at King's House in Belleville, Illinois, where he touched the lives of so many people during his years there.

Please join us in a prayer of gratitude for the generous offering of his life as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate.



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

