



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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618.466.5004 • 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 • lange@omiusa.org

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Conversion to a Mutually-Enhancing Worldview

by Maurice Lange, OMI

Where were you in '62? Perhaps some of our readers will indeed remember where they were during that year. And do you recall a major event of that year? 1962 marked the beginning of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. The momentous gathering called for a new awareness within the Church: that we were all religiously charged with being responsive to the "signs of the times."

1962 also marked the beginning of another call to new awareness. That year saw the publishing of the book *Silent Spring* written by Rachel Carson. This landmark work brought about an environmental awakening by pointing to a very real sign of the times: the chemical poisoning of landscapes and waterways resulting in a springtime of silence.

Rachel Carson's book provoked the banning of the use of DDT in this country. It would also be fair to say that it led to the first observance of Earth Day in 1970. We continue to observe this day every April 22nd, and yet I am saddened to ponder that we seem to have lost the *broad* sense of awareness and compassion birthed some four decades ago.

Just as Rachel Carson lived in a world where a highly damaging and very real sign of the times was largely unseen, so too we now live within a *worldview* that is not in tune with the reality of our time. We are largely distracted from the realization that we are living in the midst of what has been termed "*the sixth mass extinction spasm*."

"'Extinction spasm' you say?! How can that be when birds are chirping out my window? And even *deer* were frolicking beside the road this morning? There seems to be *more* critters, not less!" Well, that common perception is a symptom of the deficiency Brian Swimme has observed in saying that we modern humans have the smallest *worldview* that humans have ever had.

And thus we miss the time's signs (and fail our religious calling).

Even worse, our western worldview (that we are separate from Nature and its only worth is that which *we* can objectify) is what is actually causing this current great extinction and killing the planet. This is much to take in. **Can we re-imagine ourselves in relationship with the rest of Nature?** If we do not, the rate of species loss that is currently 100 to 1,000 times that of normal will lead to 50% of *all* species going extinct by the end of this century. *It is the way this current generation of humans chooses to live their lives and in their lifetimes that will make the difference.*

Where is the Lenten call for conversion in this regard? Where is the religious lament for what we are losing?

It has been said that whenever a species goes extinct, we lose a revelation of the Divine—it's *like tearing a page out of Scripture*. Perhaps that phrase needs to sear at a religiosity that has closed in upon itself.

Thomas Berry invites us to ponder what our image of the Divine would be if we lived on the barren, lifeless landscape of the Moon. Hmm...not anything I would feel called to worship. Tragically, here on Earth, what is also being extinguished alongside the beauty and complexity of innumerable species is a sense of Divine Beauty, Complexity, Mystery, Diversity, Fecundity, Life. The "good news of the Lord"?...quite the opposite.

We do not see this extinction crisis because we don't know Nature. And we don't really know Nature due to a *lack of direct relationship with it*.



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Letter from the Director

In what season of the year were you born? To all those Spring babies out there: Happy Birthday! May your song be bold! Rachel Carson once boldly took a stand so that Spring would not be silenced... but instead filled with birdsong and the sounds of healthy babies of all species.

Spring is about re-birth, freshness, promise. What is the “new” wishing to be birthed within you at this time?

In this issue of *La Vista Visions* our focus is **worldview**. This is crucial now as we face such planetary challenges. And we are cautioned to be leery of immediate “solutions”: these will likely result in failure- as the mindset coming up with the solution is the same one that caused the problem in the first place. In our opening article we broadly ponder what has tragically resulted from a worldview that is deficient. A healing solution to the current mass extinction can only come from a view of the planet which is different than the mindset that is fueling this global catastrophe.

Here on the bluffs at *La Vista*, we are attempting to do what we can to transform worldviews. We are inspired by modern prophets such as Rachel Carson, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. **We feel especially effective at this during the week-long *Earth Literacy* program held here each August 3 – 10.** You are invited to join us! You’ll find articles in this issue written by two of our *Earth Literacy* graduates regarding the promise of their broadened perspectives.

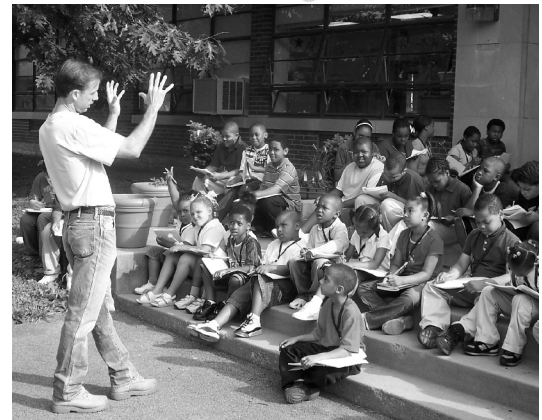
We are also excited this season about offering the retreat: “*Silent Spring: Listening to the Voices of Extinction.*” We invite all readers to make time this season to honor Earth

Spring Equinox, 2007

and become aware of the current mass species extinction.

Our farming style here at *La Vista* takes into account the myriad species we share this land with. This Spring the **Community Supported Garden** at *La Vista* begins its 5th season with over 200 families sharing in the organic bounty of vegetables, herbs and flowers. How might their worldviews be transformed by *direct experience* with their food source? Seasonal strawberries and snap peas are among my favorites! Farmer Kris Larson has been working faithfully at sowing countless seeds in the farm’s greenhouse.

I myself was born in the season of Summer. In 1962. In that historical year there was such a call to new awareness and for living that out. At nearly 45 I’m sensing a renewed calling within myself to a deepened worldview and to live consciously out of that awareness. That’s what’s birthing in me this Spring...happy birthing to you! ☺ **-Maurice Lange, OMI**



Maurice helping fashion a worldview with students from Sister Thea Bowman School in East St. Louis, Illinois.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/ Earth Relationship

TRANSFORMING WORLDVIEWS

ON THE WEB

- ✓ The World Wide Web’s most comprehensive source of information on the current mass extinction can be found at www.massexinction.net.
- ✓ Google the title “*Biodiversity conservation and the extinction of experience,*” and you will find an informative article by James R. Miller (Iowa State University). He advocates meaningful interaction with nature by providing natural areas in clear proximity to where people live and work.
- ✓ An excellent ten minute video on extinction can be viewed at www.speciesalliance.org.

BOOK

- ✓ The Future of Life by Edward O. Wilson
Harvard’s pre-eminent biologist describes those treasures of the natural world we are about to lose forever – and what we can do to save them. A classic!

"Silent Spring:

Listening
to the voices
of Extinction"



Join us here at *La Vista*
for a thought-provoking
weekend retreat.

Sat., April 14, 10:00 AM

through

Sun., April 15, midday lunch

Take advantage of this opportunity to...

- ❖ Honor the wisdom of Rachel Carson, mother of the environmental movement
- ❖ Discuss the meaning of *species* and *extinction* with local scientist
- ❖ Reflect on your role in the Universe Story during this extinction spasm
- ❖ Treasure the beauty of the bluffs and the creatures living on them
- ❖ Enjoy vegetarian, pesticide-free meals from our own organic garden

Overnight with meals - \$55.00
Commute with meals - \$35.00

To register, call 618-466-5004

A Reflection on Extinction by Thomas Merton

The other day there was a beautiful
whistling of titmice -
and now today one of them lay dead
on the grass under the house,
which may well have been some fault of mine,
as we dumped some calcium chloride
on a couple of anthills -
not as a poison
but as something to move them elsewhere.
What a miserable bundle of foolish idiots we are!
We kill everything around us
even when we think we love and respect
nature and life.
This sudden power to deal death all around us
simply by the way we live,
and in total "*innocence*" and *ignorance*,
is by far the most disturbing
symptom of our time.
I hope I at least can learn,
but in the light of Holy Week I see, again,
all my own internal contradictions - not all! Hardly!
But the fact that I am full of them.
And that we all are.
A phenomenal number of species
of animals and birds
have become extinct in the last fifty years -
due of course to man's irruption into ecology.
There was still a covey of quail around here
in early fall.
Now I don't hear a single whistle,
or hear a wing beat.



Excerpted from When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature
by Thomas Merton.

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Germinating Seeds of Earth Learning

by Bill Antone, OMI

Last August I was privileged to participate in **Earth Literacy Week** at the Oblate's *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* in Godfrey, Illinois. Thanks to Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI, his staff and teaching team for this wonderful week on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, and thanks to the other 15 or so participants in the program for their sharing and testimony.

In the 70's I spent a year at *La Vista* at the Oblate novitiate, and among the first lessons I learned came from Thomas Merton who wrote, "*All that is, is holy.*" This lesson was re-learned last August there in the same setting. We grow up in a world which likes to dissect reality, which is sometimes necessary, but we do it so habitually that our world view itself becomes overly dichotomous: the "evil ones" vs. the good ones (us, of course), up vs. down (up is usually better than down), the human being vs. Earth (the superior human being was created to subdue the brute forces of nature). With this worldview, one half of the dichotomy always comes out the loser. Yet when Earth loses, we all lose. Thomas Merton's words, could be reworded to simply say: "The *whole* universe is *holy*."

One of the many seeds of learning germinating within me because of Earth Literacy Week is the beginning of an attitude which overcomes this dichotomous worldview. Thomas Berry



puts it well when he states that the "*universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.*" It's wonderful to listen to the mountain or the tree or the river or the bird as they speak out of their own subjectivity. And they speak out in a very unselfish way!

Another seed germinating in me is learning how to live sanely in an insane world. Often I stand back and observe the insanity of our consumer lifestyle, and its accompanying addictiveness, stress, injustice, superficiality and wars. "We are driven by the cars we drive," says one author. In my own habits, I waffle between, on the one hand, simple living, wholesome diet, making do, conserving and reverencing resources, a balanced, contemplative life of service, and, on the other hand, the rushing, consuming, workaholic insanity of our world. In all this, I am learning.

I witnessed the operation of a garden of justice and solidarity: the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista*. Although in the big picture it may be a blip on the radar screen, it provides a vital space for community, learning, health, nourishment and it also announces the Gospel of solidarity. Missionaries in the Third World teach agriculture, why not in the First World, where agriculture has lost its culture?

We who work in church ministry routinely speak the language of the church. How that language is often a bridge on many occasions, and yet how often it is a dividing wall at other times! In this area of new human consciousness of Earth, when our church language enters into dialogue with science and the pluralism of cultures and religion, we are all challenged to find a *new* language. One beautiful truth of the Christian religion is the belief in the Incarnation, the Logos made flesh, made human: a human flesh that dies like all flesh, and yet like the nothingness and void of the beginning, it is full of potentiality, possibility, hope and life.

(continued on page 6)



Bill drums an emerging worldview.

Re-Grounded in the Embracing Mystery

by Virginia Ann Froehle, RSM

The best gift that I have ever received is an early awareness that there was more to what I was seeing, an awareness of a Presence in and around everything. I couldn't have used those words when I was four or six years old and, besides, I never spoke of this to anyone. The Presence stayed with me in varying degrees as I grew up and I especially felt it in personal visits to church, the ritual of Benediction, and immersion into the beauty of the earth.

Looking out my bedroom window at the black walnut tree almost leaning on the grey barn/garage next door somehow gave me the sense of a larger perspective for my limited life. Sitting on our back steps as the cherry and apple trees blossomed softened me and sometimes provided comfort or escape for a while from the hurts of childhood. I KNEW Someone was present.

Like many, I was pulled away from my closeness to the earth by a strongly intellectual education and by living in places which did not provide much green space.

In mid-life, as I involved myself in women's issues, I quickly recognized the connection between the subjugation of women and the subjugation of Earth. When I began learning of both the evolution of Earth and the specific ways it is being destroyed, my sensitivity to the Holy in nature restored itself with new vigor. I sobbed when a developer unnecessarily sawed down the 80-year-old beech trees on the property behind our back yard. I feel nauseas when I see large areas being cleared for the "McCastles" of the new subdivisions.

Like many others who also mourn destruction, I began recycling everything I could, composting, and writing letters to congress. The beauty and power of Earth invaded me again, especially during vacations or retreats. I experienced a need to get back in touch with soil and rocks and trees.

Because of this pull, the ad for a week at *La Vista* on Earth Literacy jumped off the page at me from the retreat/workshop section of National Catholic Reporter last year. I signed up immediately.

Learning and praying with others in the program re-grounded me so that I began to feel more integrated with my earlier self. I *knew* about the evolution of the Universe and Earth, but par-

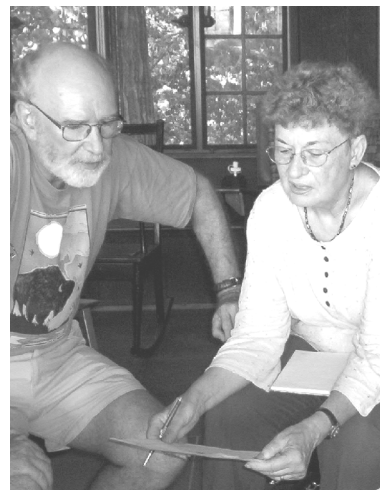
ticipation led me to *feel myself as part of this ongoing development.*

The *Earth Literacy* week fed my soul and my ministry in another major way. Reflecting on the New Universe Story and the evolution of Earth challenge my traditional images of *I Am Who Am*. Sister Sharon Zayac's presentation, early in the week, as well as her book and our discussion helped me to clarify and focus my ideas. I had been considering writing a book about how we might think of the Sacred Mystery with all of this new knowledge. I have written five chapters for the book since then.

By the end of the week, I was ready to return to recycling, composting and writing, but now with more love. Although I knew about organic foods and the reasons for buying from local growers, working in La Vista's vegetable garden even for few hours and learning tips for using the fresh produce led me to a new enjoyment of food and thoughtfulness in planning and cooking. By the way, I can't imagine better food more finely prepared than that served by Father Jack Lau and Brother Charlie Gilbert, OMI's.

The pleasure of sharing meals as well as the daily sessions with friendly, enthusiastic men and women heightened the pleasure and the just-plain-fun of the week.

Most of all, my own sense of the Embracing Mystery and of my immersion in it has continued to deepen and has flourished into joy ☺



Virginia Ann Froehle is a Sister of Mercy whose interest has always been the Mystery of God and how we experience it. She is a retreat director, spiritual director and the author of Loving Yourself More: 101 Meditations for Women and 'Tis a Gift to Be Free: Making Choices on Life's Paths both published by Ave Maria Press.



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*"A spiritual discipline is tuning out of a deeply rooted, vitiating and debasing **worldview**...
and tuning in to a liberating and creative one."*

- Brian Swimme

(Mutually-Enhancing Worldview... continued from page 1)

Sallie McFague writes in her book Super, Natural Christians:
Naturalist Robert Pyle claims that one of the major causes for the ecological crisis is the "extinction of experience": the lack of close encounters with Earth in the lives of many children and adults. It is not just that other life forms are becoming scarce or extinct, but our experience of and with them is, too. The results are deep and disturbing. We not only learn less about these earth others; but disaffection sets in, and hence we care less for their well-being. We do not care about what we do not know. With the loss of direct experience with nature, a cycle begins: distance breeds lack of knowledge, lack of interest, lack of concern. Pyle notes, "People who care conserve; people who don't know don't care. What is the extinction of a condor to a child who has never known a wren?"

...the extinction of nature and the extinction of the experience of nature are profoundly connected. Our encounters with nature can be reminders that we do care about these others who are now so frequently out of sight, out of mind."

With such an ultimate "sign of the times" as the current mass extinction calling to us...this Lent, this Earth Day, and beyond, can we challenge ourselves to the discipline of a mutually-enhancing human-Earth relationship? Can we allow our worldviews to be broadened and our compassion deepened by direct experience with the revelatory dimension of what is left of the natural world? ☯

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

(Seeds of Earth Learning ...continued from page 4)

Finally, among other things, I learned that Wendell Berry wrote something like this:

"You don't know *who* you are until you know *where* you are."
Here in this corner of the world where I live, the international border is more in the consciousness of human beings than is the flow of the Tijuana River and the bioregion it represents. This bioregion suffers tremendous abuse, yet still the native flora and fauna try to survive on both sides of the border as the Tijuana River quietly crosses from Mexico into the US as it flows on to the borderless Pacific Ocean. Some may see it as a sorry excuse for a river, almost dry at times, but perhaps they don't see it at all, nor its *upper reaches*, the *coastal canyons* and *ravines*, the *cholla cactus* and *roadrunner*, the *taran-tula* and *jackrabbit*, the *green moment in Spring*, and the *Ocean's surf unceasing*. ☯

Bill Antone currently lives and does ministry on the outskirts of Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. He hails originally from the Pacific Northwest and is an Oblate priest and member of the US Provincial Council for the Oblates. Bill enjoys climbing the rocky hills located very close to the home he shares with another Oblate.