



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Good-bye to the Gumball

by Maurice Lange, OMI

I recently said good-bye to an old friend. I believe she was up in her nineties or over one hundred...even she wasn't sure. She died this past Thursday.

She was one of the largest trees (a "Gumball") here on the Oblate land, and it was determined that she had to go. Being responsible homeowners, this judgment was passed as the old girl's roots (growing near the house) were beginning to grow into the community library. With the old tree threatening the house the decision was made. And so, during Thursday morning quick work was made of her wide branches, tall limbs and finally massive trunk...but not before a nearby white birch had also to be cut down to make the overall job easier.

This appears to be a rational, logical, conceivably difficult, decision.

I wonder why we all as humans who appear so precise and efficient at zeroing in on any real (or perceived) threats to our homes—be they treeroots, insects, Iraqis, or in-laws—find ourselves severely reticent to zoom out and recognize the threats to our *larger* home. And it appears we are even less zealous to muster up much energy to do anything about such very real threats.

Our *Earth home* is imperiled.

What imperils it? Why are we found as passive in the midst of this threat? The reason quite likely is that if we really pondered what threatens our Earth home, we would not be able to point to this cause or that alien "out there" but instead would have to admit that the peril is the result of ourselves. Or more precisely: what imperils Earth is a crisis of perceptions.

Our western, industrial mindset perceives the Earth as a collection of objects waiting to be fashioned into consumer items. We see the planet and its "resources" as infinite and all meant for human use.

This is what is driving the ecological crisis: a crisis of our perceptions. And our perceptions only change when something comes along to call them into question...

A deficient perception is the threat and this is what needs to be focused on and transformed as clearly as any invasive tree root into a house.

Houses come and houses go. They may last for 100 years or more. And they do surely need our protection. Their materials come from Earth and are deserving of our care and attention.

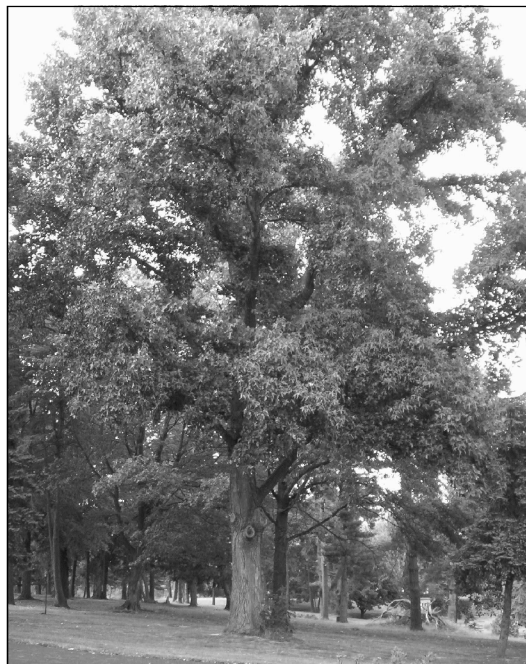
However, our Earth home is currently threatened on a scale as never before. Earth has been evolving, emerging and becoming more diverse throughout its 5

billion year story.

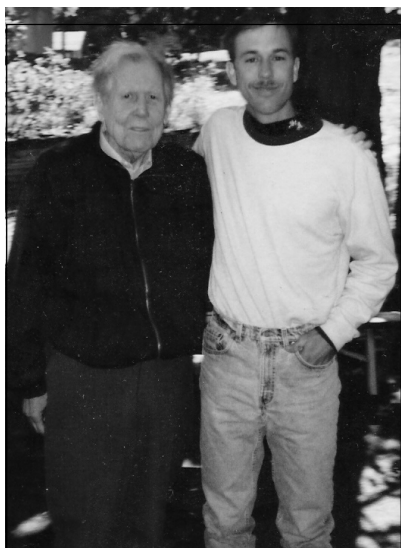
The last 65 million years called the Cenozoic Era (since the end of the dinosaurs) has been called the lyric period of Earth, as this time has been the most colorful, diverse, and bounteous. Scientists have recently recognized that the Cenozoic Era is at its terminal phase.

Pope John Paul spent much of his time working to call attention to such threats and the need for transformation and ecological conversion. Can we now heed his prophetic words and embrace our "*ecological vocation*"? Can we recog-

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Letter from the Director



Thomas Berry (l) and
Maurice, 1999

September. Autumn. Gratitude. As the season's first cool northerly breezes make their way to *La Vista*, we give thanks. The shorter days, the early Fall colors, the continual bounteous harvests all stir our hearts. What do you find yourself feeling grateful for at this time?

We are particularly grateful as we near the end of our 5th full year

here at the Oblate Ecological Initiative. The ministry and work of both *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* and the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* have reached thousands of people in diverse, creative and hopefully enlightening ways.

Last month we offered our annual weeklong Earth Literacy program. The combination of this lovely and fruitful place, 16 participants, 6 staff and 4 adjunct staff broadened all of our visions. Such a comprehensive time pondering the Story

of the Universe! And our geological field trip up the Mississippi River evoked a deeper bioregional sensitivity!

During the Earth Literacy program the *Community Supported Garden* held it's annual Tomato Fest. August is tomato season in these parts, and the Garden's success is often measured by how well the tomatoes do. This year we had tons! So why not celebrate?! Garden shareholders came together and played tomato games and tomato trivia, and my fellow Oblate "Chef Jack" Lau judged the annual tomato cookoff. Our Earth literacy participants were "wowed" by the sense of community that is formed by this sustainable food source. The accomplishments resulting from a covenant between the Oblates, 200 shareholder families, our farmer Kris Larson, and the land of *La Vista* still amaze me too!

As we come to the end of our 5th full year, we'd like to dedicate this issue of *La Vista Visions* to Thomas Berry. The insights and vision of this cultural historian have been foundational for our work here. I was privileged to meet Thomas and to spend a fair bit of time with him at Genesis Farm in New Jersey.

Thomas calls us humans to enter into a ***mutually-enhancing relationship with Earth***. This is the only way into a healthy future and our most important task for the present. This "Great Work" of our time now will ensure the opportunity for the welling up of gratitude in Autumns hence. ☯

-Maurice Lange, OMI

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/ Earth Relationship

RESOURCES

- Each year the **Worldwatch Institute on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society** publishes an annual review of planetary health. Reading it is a good way to be informed and to broaden your perspective. Find out how to purchase State of the World 2007 and much more on their web site: www.worldwatch.org.
- To learn more about the life and work of Thomas Berry, view the video "**Thomas Berry: The Great Story**". To order, go to www.bullfrogfilms.com and search the catalog.
- The **Northwest Earth Institute** is recognized as a national leader in the development of innovative programs that empower individuals and organizations to protect the Earth. These programs include discussion courses, home eco-parties, and eco-tips for sustainable living. Visit their web site at www.nwei.org for information on how to bring these programs to your bioregion.



"The Earth Literacy program was far beyond any of my expectations and covered a wide variety of topics and experiences. It is a truly enriching week for anyone who is deeply concerned about the future of our home, planet Earth."



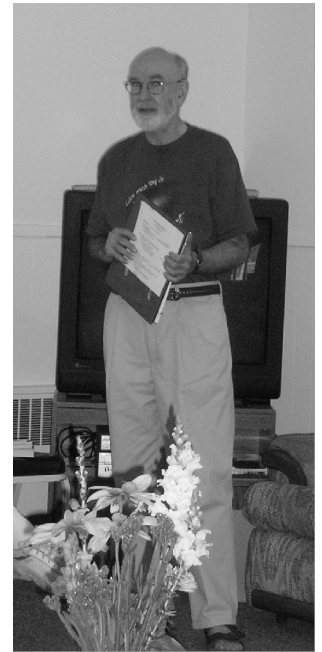
"The most powerful aspect of the course was the wisdom found within the collective group."



"Earth Literacy is so much more than a workshop. It is a lived experience in community of the universe story and Earth's story and our human story within the universe story. All is one story!"



"At age 78 my eyes, ears, and mind were opened to a whole new spectrum of view and purpose."



**August
2007**



The Great Community of Earth

by Thomas Berry

At a special event held during the UN Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August 2000, Thomas Berry spoke of our common dreams for peace on Earth.

Tonight as we look up at the evening sky, with the stars emerging against the fading background of the sunset, we think of the mythic foundations of our future. We need to engage in a shared dream experience.

The experience that we have spoken of as we look up at the starry sky at night, and as, in the morning, we see the landscape revealed as the sun draws over the Earth – these experiences reveal a physical world but also a more profound world that cannot be bought with money, cannot be manufactured with technology, cannot be listed on the stock market, cannot be made in the chemical laboratory, cannot be reproduced with all our genetic engineering, cannot be sent by e-mail. These experiences require only that we follow the deepest feelings of the human soul.

What we look for is no longer the Pax Romana, the peace of imperial Rome, nor is it simply the Pax Humana, the peace among humans, but the Pax Gaia, the peace of Earth and every being on the Earth. This is the original and final peace, the peace granted by whatever power it is that brings our world into being. Within the universe, the planet Earth with all its wonders is the place for the meeting of the divine and the human.

As humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by

the Earth, healed by the Earth. The natural world tells us: *I will feed you, I will clothe you, I will shelter you, I will heal you. Only do not so devour me or use me that you destroy my capacity to mediate the divine and the human. For I offer you a communion with the divine, I offer you gifts that you can exchange with each other, I offer you flowers whereby you may express your reverence for the divine and your love for each other.*



"The heavens themselves are curved over the Earth in an encompassing embrace."

In the vastness of the sea, in the snow-covered mountains, in the rivers flowing through the valleys, in the serenity of the landscape, and in the foreboding of the great storms that sweep over the land, in all these experiences I offer you inspiration for your music, for your art, your dance.

All these benefits the Earth gives to us individually, in our communities and throughout the entire Earth. Yet we cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves individually or if we seek to deprive others of their share by increasing our own. The food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies. To eat alone is to be starved in some part of our being. We need to reflect that our individual delight in the song of the birds or the sound of the crickets and cicadas in the evening is enhanced, not diminished, when we listen together in the evening with our families and our friends.

Perhaps our greatest resource for peace is the awareness that we enrich ourselves when we share our possessions with others. We discover peace when we learn to esteem those goods whereby we benefit ourselves in proportion as we give them to others. The very structure and functioning of the universe and of the planet

earth reveal an indescribable diversity bound in an all-embracing unity. The heavens themselves are curved over the Earth in an encompassing embrace.

Here I would recall the experience of Henry David Thoreau who lived a very simple life with few personal possessions. At one time he was attracted to the idea of purchasing an especially beautiful bit of land with a pasture and a wooded area. He even made a deposit. But then he realized that it was not necessary to purchase the land because, he reasoned, he already possessed the land in its wonder and its beauty as he passes by each day. This intimacy with the land would not be taken away from him no matter who owned the land in its physical reality. So indeed that same bit of land could be owned in its wonder and beauty by an unlimited number of persons, even though in its physical reality it might be owned by a single person.

Such was the argument of Mencius, the Chinese Confucian writer who taught the emperor that he should open up the royal park for others, since it would be an even greater joy to have others present with him, just as at a musical concert we enjoy the music without diminishing, but increasing, our own joy as we share it with others. So too for those in the Bodhisattva tradition of India, where those such Shanti Deva, in the fifth century of our era, took a vow to refuse beatitude itself until all living creatures were saved. For only when they participated in his joy could he be fully caught up in the delight of paradise.

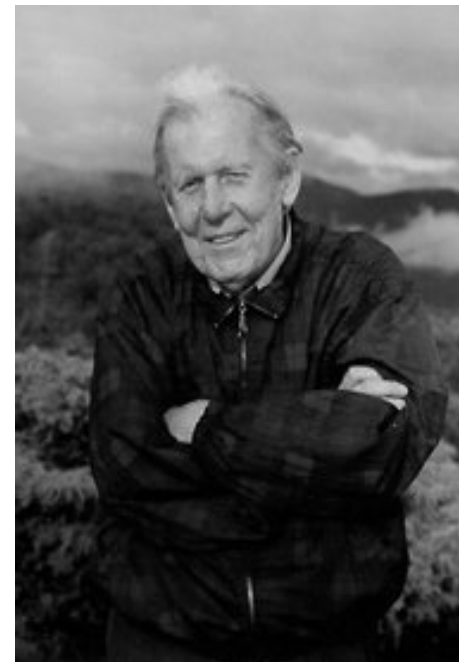
It has taken many centuries for us to meet with each other in the comprehensive manner that is now possible. While for many long centuries we had fragments of information concerning each other, we can now come together, speak with each other, and dine with each other. Above all we can tell our stories to each other.

Tonight we might recall the ancient law of hospitality, whereby the wanderer was welcomed. So it was with Ulysses on his long voyage home after the Trojan War. When exhausted and driven ashore on occasion, and surrounded by a people he had never met before, he

was consistently rested, invited to dine with the people of the place, and then in the quiet moment afterward invited to tell his story. So it has been, I trust, with each of us in these past few days. To some extent we have been able to tell our stories to each other. Now a new phase in all our stories has begun as we begin to shape the Great Story of all peoples as we move into the future.

As a final reflection, I would suggest that we see these early years of the twenty-first century as the period when we discover the great community of the Earth, a comprehensive community of all the living and nonliving components of the planet. We are just discovering that the human project is itself a component of the Earth project, that our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with each other. Such are the foundations of our journey into the future. ☉

Thomas Berry From his academic beginnings as a historian of world cultures and religions, Berry developed into a historian of the Earth and its evolutionary processes. He describes himself as a “geologist”. His major contributions to the discussion on the environment are in his books *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, and, with Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story*. His latest collection of essays is *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. Thomas Berry’s thought and spirit infuse the programs at *La Vista Ecological Learning Center*.





"All of us are called to the Great Work of this time: to create a period when humans become present to Earth in a mutually enhancing manner."

-Thomas Berry

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nize the uniqueness, mystery and blessing of our Earth home? Can we dedicate our lives and thus our lifestyles to promoting a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship?

Can we practice "comprehensive compassion"? Can we grow our hearts into widening, non-dualistic circles of love? Let's grow in humility and not feel so threatened by the threat. After all, they are our deficient perceptions. We can change. Our Earth home requires this of us now.

Earth Literacy, 2008 August 3-10

Join us this week as we work toward a "transformed perception." Write, call, or go to our website for more information.



How Can I Participate?

All people seeking a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth are welcome to participate in the *Ecological Learning Center* and the *Community Supported Garden* of the Oblate Ecological Initiative. Just call or write for more information and/or to register.

Due to the wonderful response, the CSG is full for this year. We are currently registering new shareholders for 2008. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in this office as well as in the Garden.

Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI and Sister Maxine Pohlman, SSND are available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact them with your request.

We do ask that guests and shareholders respect this site and its primary function as a novitiate. Visits to the office and garden are made by appointment. Please call Fr. Maurice for directions at 618-466-5004.

Visit us on the web at www.lavistaelc.org. and at www.lavistacsa.org.

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