



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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## An Introduction to Cosmology: What is Your Story?

By Maurice Lange, OMI

"Tell me a story!" As children, how often did we so plead with our parents at bedtime?! Let us now ponder: from where does this deep and continual yearning for story arise? Humans, both young and old, seek to live in a world of meaning. Children, especially, appropriate a worldview like a sponge absorbs water.

What is the story, the *big story*, that we are telling our children? Culturally, we tell the big story in so many ways (and not just at bedtime). This big story is told both by ordinary folks like us and by masterful tellers as well. This big story is actually a cosmology.

A cosmology imparts a view of the world, it answers the profound questions like: "Where do we come from?"

"How did we get here?" "What is our place in the world?"

"Where are we going?" Cosmology

(through providing answers to such questions) happens whether we realize it or not!

By examining tribal existence in our human history, we find that each clan would have its designated storyteller. Gathered around the nightly fire, the teller, by the use of story, would entertain, enchant and evoke the depths of the listeners. These stories consisted of interactions with the gods, with each other and with the rest of the natural world. Meaning would be made as the actions and moral of the story would be heard and reflected upon.

Even though we as a Western people do not live in tribes, a cultural story is nevertheless told to us and to

our children. This story surely shapes and molds our worldview. It guides a relationship (or lack thereof) with the Divine, with each other, and with the rest of the natural world.

As illustrated by physicist Brian Swimme, even though we no longer gather nightly around a fire in caves like our ancestors of old, we still yearn for and are told a story. Only today, the cave has been replaced by what? The TV room! And the fire? Well, the television burns

bright and fixes our gaze! Who is our current day storyteller? Advertisements. With our children watching 30,000 ads before they enter first grade, they can't help being formed by these stories touting the religion of consumerism and materialism.

*"The Universe is a communion of subjects,  
not a collection of objects" - Thomas Berry, CP*

Is it any wonder, then, that we live in a nation which represents 5% of the world's human population, but consumes 25% of the world's resources?!?! How did this come to be? What perpetuates it? What could bring about its healing?

The dominant story or myth of our time is that the Earth exists solely for the use of the human. We are immersed in a worldview that says the Earth has no meaning in and of itself. The message we receive is that the planet is basically raw material waiting to be refined into consumer items. The point of our lives, we are told, is to get jobs so that we can be happy by buying stuff. And yet, as priest and cultural historian, Thomas Berry  
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## Letter from the Director

Summer Solstice, 2002

Welcome to the second edition of *La Vista Visions*! May the unfolding of summer be pleasant for you. We received much positive feedback regarding the Spring inaugural issue of this newsletter. We hope you find this issue inspiring and helpful as well. Speaking of our newsletter, I wish to introduce and thank Kathy Davis who has been responsible for the layout and much of the design. This past Spring Kathy came on board as part time office assistant here at the Oblate Ecological Initiative and we are happy she did!

Kathy has brought a wealth of perspective and life experience to her position. Being married to Mark and having two young sons, Will and Levi, Kathy's vision for long term health and happiness for her family is not separate from her desire for health and happiness of the planet. The cosmology that brings these worlds together for Kathy was largely informed by her experience as a lay missionary. She served both in the Ivory Coast and Bolivia working with the Society of African Missions and the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Currently residing in nearby Alton, Kathy worships with the St. Cronan's faith community in St. Louis and is also part of the monthly "*Simpler Living, Compassionate Life*" discussion group meeting here at La Vista. As well, Kathy and family are active shareholders in our community supported garden. As family needs come first, Kathy will now be continuing with the Ecological Initiative in the role of consultant.

Speaking of the community supported garden, this project at La Vista continues to take shape. Shareholders are gathering monthly to develop the infrastructure for this alternative, sustainable food source. Among the many committees already formed, we are conducting a search for a person who is qualified to be a head gardener. Resumes are still coming in and are accepted until September 1. Other recent events here have included an ecospirituality evening with the local Episcopalian community, a retreat offered to the Alton Catholic Deanery, our first Earth Literacy program, and the celebration of the summer solstice.

In this issue of *La Vista Visions* our lead article explores the meaning of cosmology. One's cosmology is basic to their view of the world. If a culture's cosmology says that humans are separate from nature, then technologies such as the unnatural genetic modification of organisms can arise. Be sure to read the article on this pervasive and questionable technology written by Rosemary Bates from our Oblate office of Justice and Peace/ Integrity of Creation in Washington, DC.

Finally, I hope you are able to spend some quality time outside this summer season!



Maurice discussing seeds and ecology with participants at Earth Day 2002 at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois.

## Creating A Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

### Summer Yard and Garden: Growing Truly Green

25% to 50% of all municipal waste is yard waste. Organic material in landfills produces leachate and methane gas. Start mulching grass and composting kitchen scraps to return the nutrients to your yard, garden, flower beds, and potted plants.

To control slugs (and other crawling pests), sprinkle diatomaceous earth around the garden.

A brown bat can consume 600 mosquitos in one hour; buy or build a bat house for a whole colony! (Surf to [www.cleanairgardening.com](http://www.cleanairgardening.com) or phone 1-888-439-9101)

Mulch in the garden and around trees and shrubs to slow water evaporation, protect plant roots from extreme temperatures and to help prevent weeds.

The first step in organic lawn maintenance is planting a grass that is appropriate for your area. Call your county extension office or local nursery for recommendations.

If Japanese beetle grubs eat more than their share of your lawn, spread a natural pesticide - bacillus popillae. (You can purchase a brand "Milky Spore Powder" at [www.wormsway.com](http://www.wormsway.com) or call 1-800-274-9676.) The toxicity of natural pesticides diminishes in a much shorter time than chemical pesticides.

Deeper grass roots require less watering and crowd out weeds. Encourage root growth by mowing only the top 1/3 of the blade, leaving 2 to 2.5 inches and by watering only when the blades begin to wilt or water one inch once a week. For advice and explanations about natural lawn care and organic gardening go to [www.nsrp.bc.ca](http://www.nsrp.bc.ca) or call 604-985-9730 (British Columbia).

# Earth Literacy Program: "Exploring the Sacred Universe"

August 3-10, 2002

During the week-long Earth Literacy Program, the Universe Story provides the framework for exploring the meaningful questions of our origin and for reconnecting with Creation and the Creator. As we re-imagine ourselves by way of this new understanding of our origin, radical changes in our human activities and attitudes will be called for. The Universe Story will supply the creative energy needed to accomplish this Great Work. During the final days of the program, as we shift our attention to bioregionalism, we will consider how our cultural activities enhance or degrade local ecosystems.

The Earth Literacy Program is limited to a small number of participants who will live, reflect, and work together in an experiential learning process. In addition to the guided activities and instruction, there is a strong emphasis on immersion into the natural world and on developing practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life-style. All of the activities are designed to awaken the participants' creativity and to provide the support of a group of peers who hold the same pursuits.

An important part of the program is developing a deep connection to the land. To this end we strongly encourage the participants to: 1) Share in a simple group ritual of greeting the new day; 2) Choose a sacred site on the land and visit it daily; 3) Spend time in La Vista's organic garden; and 4) Keep a personal journal. While most of the activities of this week are experientially oriented, there are a few short readings assigned from *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, in addition to other articles and videos.

To participate in the Earth Literacy Program, please contact Fr. Maurice Lange.  
*Our program has been inspired by the Earth Literacy Program at Genesis Farm, Blairstown, New Jersey.  
Call to inquire about their offerings at (908) 362-6735.*

## Cosmology (continued from Page 1)

reminds us "The Earth is not a collection of objects, it's a communion of subjects". This too, leads to a cosmology. And this worldview greatly challenges the dominant story of our culture.

If we live in a worldview absent of deep meaning, then our lives, our actions, and our faith will reflect that absence. However, if like so many of the ancient ancestors, our culture has a functional, deeply meaningful story, then our lives can be rich, vibrant, and well lived.

The new story that is now breaking into our consciousness is that *the Universe fundamentally is a story*. Humans discovered only in the last century that we live in a Universe that is both expanding and developing. It is a 13 billion year story that continues to emerge even in your reading of these words. The Universe from its beginning is a spiritual as well as a physical reality. We come from and participate in that immense, Sacred story.

As humans, we now wield technological power of the magnitude that this is altering the ongoing story of the

Earth. If we are to live sustainably now and ensure life for future generations, we need a world view that sustains and ensures life. The story that needs to be told to our children and to this culture is that we come from the same numinous energy that gave birth to galaxies, mountains and microbes. The Great Work for us and our children is to consciously enter into the Sacred story of the Universe and help create a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Now that's a cosmology that is functional, a story where all can live together in justice and peace.

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We invite you to consider exploring cosmology in greater depth. You are welcome to this Summer's remaining Earth Literacy program (see page 5) or attending one here in Summer, 2003. We will publish the 2003 dates in the Autumn issue of *La Vista Visions*.

We also recommend some reading that would compliment the articles in this issue: *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future* by Thomas Berry, CP; *And God Saw that It Was Good: Catholic Theology and The Environment*, edited by Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Walter Grazer; *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity And The New Story* by Brian Swimme.

# GMOs - What are they? You're probably eating them.

By Rosemary Bates

What do Kraft Macaroni and Cheese and Hershey's Chocolate Syrup have in common? Along with thousands of other products in supermarkets today, they are made with genetically modified organisms (GMOs). And, unless you have taken great pains to avoid GMOs, chances are you have already eaten them. Two-thirds of food on supermarket shelves in the U.S. contain GMOs.

A genetically modified organism (also called "genetically engineered") is a plant, animal or microorganism (e.g., bacteria) that is created through unnatural and nontraditional breeding methods. It is the product of genetic material that is transferred from one organism to another, that would not have occurred naturally. For example, genes from fish have been inserted into strawberries and tomatoes. Genetic engineering is used to introduce or improve particular characteristics, including herbicide tolerance, pesticide enhancement, added vitamin or protein content, and seed sterility.

While advocates contend that genetic engineering harbingers the next agricultural revolution, its critics maintain that it is a questionable and potentially harmful revolution. The benefits, proponents extol, are staggering - from producing predictable and higher yields per acre to ending vitamin deficiencies and hunger. Its risks, skeptics warn, run from the "corporatization" of agriculture (multinational corporations securing patents to indigenous seeds and flooding the market with sterile seeds) to the untested effects of this technology on the environment and human health. The dearth of data on the short and long-term effects of genetic engineering ensures that the debate is with us for years to come. Meanwhile, GMOs are out there, in our fields and in the marketplace, and we - humans, animals, plants, and the wider web of life - are the working laboratory.

As you can see, genetic engineering raises numerous and complex ethical, political, environmental, legal and social questions that are difficult to outline in this short article. From the outset, religious congregations have been at the forefront of the GMO debate, offering a moral and ethical perspective, questioning its untested effects, and cautioning that its stated benefits will only further enrich the already financially bloated

multinational biotech companies, and not the most needy. We in the Oblate Justice & Peace / Integrity of Creation Office have joined with other congregations and concerned shareholders in the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility ([www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)) in dialogues with food and biotech companies on their products and policies. Also, through the Africa Faith and Justice Network ([www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org)), we are raising the issue of the devastating effects of GMOs on the culture and livelihood of small family farmers in Africa.

By offering these facts on genetic engineering, I hope to spark your interest in this technology and to encourage further education and dialogue on its broader implications for the human family and for all of Creation.

## Facts on the Issue

1. 70 million acres of GMO crops are grown in the U.S. today. More than half of the soybeans and about one quarter of the corn cultivated in 2001 were transgenic. Two other commercial crops are transgenic cotton and canola. Genetically engineered wheat is due to be commercially introduced in 2003.
2. There is little nutritional, flavor or consumer benefit. Financial gains are reaped by the firms producing GMOs.
3. 60-70% of all packaged food on U.S. grocery store shelves contains genetically altered ingredients.
4. Food and Drug Administration scientists stated that genetic engineering is different from traditional breeding, and so are the risks. Despite this warning, the FDA continues to assert that GMOs are not different and don't require special regulations or labeling.
5. Neither the FDA, the Department of Agriculture (USDA), nor the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has done any long-term testing of GMOs in food or in the environment, nor has any regulation specific to bioengineered food been established. Biotech companies are only asked to conduct *voluntary* testing of their products to show that this new technology is safe.
6. FDA scientists and doctors warned that GMO foods could have new and different risks such as hidden aller-

(continued next page: GMO's)

## GMO's (continued from page 4)

gens, increased plant-toxin levels and the potential to hasten the spread of antibiotic-resistant disease.

7. The USDA has reviewed more than 5,000 applications for biotech crop field trials without denying a single one.

8. USDA officials claimed they would conduct long-term studies of GMO crops, but have no plans to require any pre-market or pre-release assessment. Studies conducted after our environment and food supply have been contaminated will be too late.

9. The European Union mandated labeling of GMOs in 1998. Companies could choose either to label or to purchase non-GE products. Most have chosen using non-genetically-engineered products.

10. In 1999 Gerber declared they would no longer use GMOs in their baby food products. In 2000 Frito-Lay asked contracted farmers to grow GE-free corn.

11. Pollen drift from genetically engineered crops to native or wild species or to non-genetically engineered crops such as organic fields has been documented. In November 2001, scientists at the University of California at Berkeley found evidence of extensive genetic contamination of maize in remote Mexican lands where wild and original varieties grow.

12. In a Bt seed, genes from the Bt (*bacillus thuringiensis*) bacteria are forced into the seed and the plant becomes a pesticide. The toxicity does not break down in sunlight like the sprayed form of Bt. Toxins that are produced remain in the plant all the way to our plate. There are also concerns about buildup of those toxins in the soil and potential harm to soil microbes and beneficial insects.

12. Farmers who grow GMO crops actually use more herbicide, not less. For example, Monsanto created Roundup-Ready (RR) soy, corn and cotton specifically so that farmers would continue to buy Roundup, the company's bestselling chemical weed killer, which is sold with RR seeds.

13. In 1998, African scientists at a United Nations conference strongly objected to Monsanto's promotional GMO campaign that used photos of starving African children under the headline "Let the Harvest Begin." The scientists, who represented many of the nations affected by poverty and hunger, said gene

technologies would undermine the nations' capacities to feed themselves by destroying established diversity, local knowledge and sustainable agricultural systems.

14. Biotech companies eagerly pursue a genetic-engineering technique named "terminator" technology that would render a crop's seed sterile, making it impossible for farmers to save seed for replanting. Half the world's farmers rely on saved seed to produce food that 1.4 billion people rely on for daily nutrition.

15. GMOs may be the greatest threat to sustainable agriculture on the planet. Many organic farmers rely on a natural bacterial spray to control certain crop pests. The advent of genetically modified, insect-resistant crops is likely to lead to insects that are immune to this natural pesticide. When this biological pesticide is rendered ineffective, other farmers will turn to increasingly toxic chemicals to deal with the "superbugs" created by GMOs. Meanwhile, organic farmers will be out of options.

(Sources: Website of the Adrian Dominican Sisters, [www.adriansisters.org](http://www.adriansisters.org); Organic View: September 28, 1999; ECNews Summer 1999; Nucleus, Fall 1999, p 3; Seed Savers Exchange, 1999 Summer; [www.thecampaign.org/education.htm](http://www.thecampaign.org/education.htm); The True Food Network, [www.truefoodnow.org](http://www.truefoodnow.org); "Agricultural Biotechnology: A Catholic Rural Life Perspective," National Catholic Rural Life Conference, June 2002, [www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com))

## Legislation for Labeling

Legislation for labeling GMOs in the U.S. was first introduced in 1999. The current bill in congress is **HR4814, The Genetically Engineered Food Right to Know Act of 2002** propelled by Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) and 23 other members. You can write your representatives:

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515



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Our paradigms...determine our worldview, the way we perceive things,  
what we perceive, what we can see as possible, what we can't see as possible,  
and what we can't see at all. - Werner Erhard

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## How Can I Participate?

All people seeking a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth are welcome to participate in the scheduled programs 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, we will probably need to put newly interested possible shareholders on a waiting list. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in the office as well as the garden.

Fr. Maurice is also available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact him with your requests.

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 Lange, OMI for directions.

## OEI CALENDAR

August 3-10	Earth Literacy Program "Exploring the Sacred Universe"
August 11 Sunday	Community Supported Garden Shareholder Meeting: 5pm
September 8 Sunday	Community Supported Garden Shareholder Meeting: 5pm
September 21 Saturday	Autumn Equinox Celebration 4 pm; followed by a potluck feast

**For more information, please call 618-466-5004**

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*Do not be conformed to this age any longer, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,  
so that you may be able to discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Paul, Romans 12:2*

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