



Sister Mary McAuliffe with students.

liant smile of confidence testified that indeed he knew he was caring for our planet. He was an adamant participant in the study his class then made of one factor in global warming, the "Treasure of the Rain Forest."

How hopeful we can be as we educate the leaders of tomorrow, that they carry such commitment in their hearts and understanding in their heads.

## Earth Day at Loretto Academy

by DR. STEVE JUDD

Earth Day began early at Loretto Academy with some of the students giving up one of their Saturday mornings (the day of the prom) to collect litter around the Loretto neighborhood. We collected over 60 large trash bags full and "beautified" Loretto at least temporarily. The Science Literary Magazine sold Earth Day T-shirts which the students wore on Earth Day to show their unity with the earth. The money raised went to help underwrite the cost of our magazine "One World, Un Mundo" a bilingual examination of some of our major environmental problems (air and water pollution, deforestation, endangered species, energy consumption, and garbage). The Science Department sponsored a "Trash Art" and environmental poster contest and displayed the works during our Earth Week activities. The highlight of our Earth Day activities was an address by Mary Rhodes Buckler, SL entitled "Befriending the Earth" where she discussed ecotheology (see *Loretto Magazine*, Summer, 1993).

## The Intimate Universe

by THOMAS BERRY, CP

*Thomas Berry is the author of The Dream of the Earth and The Universe Story.*

Throughout the natural world there is an intimacy of things with each other. The intimacy of the wind and the soaring raptors, the rain and the vegetation, the sea and the shore. So too the intimacy of the bee with the flower, the intimacy of the bluebird parents with the newly hatched young.

Even in predator-prey relations there is a dependency established so that each has a profound need for the other. In the end it is an intimacy rather than an enmity. The ultimate test is the creativity of beings in the presence of each other.

Even in the prelife phase of things, there is the intimacy of the atoms in the molecular structures, the intimacy of the sun with the earth.

The very structure and creativity of the universe depend on this intimacy of things with each other. Every being exists in relation with the entire community of beings that compose the universe. So with the human mode of being. We come into existence through the earlier modes of being and in intimate bonding with the universe itself.

Such reflection provides a profound instruction as regards our spirituality. For the intimate relations of the human with the other modes of being has been perhaps the most neglected aspect of our spiritual teaching. A neglect that has been an enormous detri-



ment to ourselves and to the entire community of living and non-living beings on the earth.

We seem unable to recognize that there is a *single sacred community* of the entire universe. Not only is the human sacred. The entire universe is sacred! How wonderful! We could not ourselves be sacred except in a sacred universe.

By definition to be in a natural world is to be in a sacred world, a world immediately in the presence of the divine. This intimate relation that we have with the surrounding world can be appreciated if we reflect that our imagination, our emotions and our intellect would all be completely dysfunctional without the activation they receive from the outer world.

If we lived on the moon our imagination would be as desolate as the moon, our emotions as dull, our intellect as empty. Our sense of the divine would reflect the lunar landscape. There would be no poetry or music or literature.

From this we can realize that the preservation of the wilderness, the free-flowing streams, the dazzling variety of butterflies, the mockingbird and the bluebird, the deer and the wolf and the timber rattlesnake, the coastlands, the mountains, the central plains; the preservation of all this is not simply an aesthetic inspiration or recreational need or an economic urgency.

It is even more a necessity for the inner life of the soul; for the deep mystery of the divine is revealed in each of these modes of being, but in a supreme manner within the comprehensive unity of the whole. In this experience of the universe we awaken to the majesty and the awesome presence of the divine.

Just now as we are terminating 65 million years of life development on the planet, we find that spiritual persons, even deeply religious persons, seem blissfully unaware of what is happening. There is little mention of this in our spiritual teaching since our dependence on the natural world was never a significant part of our spirituality.

We find little reference in our biblical homilies, only a rare note in our religious publications, no special attention to this subject in our educational programs, no public protest. The impending death of half the living species on earth is looked at with a casual indifference.

This failure of Christians to assume their responsibility for the fate of the earth is perhaps their greatest single failure in the total course of Christian history. It is especially a failure of those religious communities that are most committed to a spiritual way of life.

What is happening at present is more than a particular phase of human history or some cultural modification to be fitted in with the sequence of changes that have occurred from the neolithic through the classical civilizations to the medieval and modern periods. What is happening is beyond any parallel with former changes in the course of human affairs or even in the life story of the planet.

For the first time in the 600 million year story of visible life on the earth, a single species has the power deliberately to alter the chemistry of the planet in a deleterious way and to extinguish species at a rate and in a manner never known before.

In considering the enormity of what is happening and the consequences for every living being on the planet we might reflect on the need to establish religious communities dedicated to protecting the earth from further devastation and to guide the human community toward a period when we would be present to the earth in a mutually-enhancing manner.

The setting up of model communities that would enable humans to be present to the earth in a mutually-enhancing manner would surely be one of the most effective ways of fulfilling the highest Christian purposes in these times.

Since the present assault on the planet is terminating the Cenozoic Era of Earth history, there is need to think in terms of a new geo-biological period such as the Ecozoic Era, when a new integration and a new florescence of living forms would be brought into being.

Establishing the Ecozoic Era is the Great Work of the immediate present, just as bringing into existence the medieval period was the Great Work of those who lived in Europe between the sixth and the eleventh centuries. This Great Work in the creation of the medieval period was led by the monastic orders of the period, especially by the Order founded by Saint Benedict in the early sixth century.



Sandra Ardoyno, SL



What needs to be done now is parallel, but at a much greater order of magnitude, with what was done in evocation of this early medieval period. There is a need for dedicated persons to lead this work, persons with the creative abilities evident in the Benedictine personalities in the monasteries and convents of this earlier period, persons such as Hildegard of Bingen and Bernard of Clairvaux.

Another parallel might be made with the development of the women's religious communities during the nineteenth century. In that century some hundreds of religious communities were founded for every imaginable purpose, for alleviation of poverty and sickness, for all kinds of human affliction, for education at every level, for missions to every part of the planet, for protection of young women working in the newly developing industrial-commercial metropolitan areas.

For many of these religious communities their work has become less in demand, the resources for carrying on the work less available, or their personnel has declined due to changes in the social order. Numbers of religious communities might be terminated in the next few decades.

Just what type of religious dedication or what life style would be appropriate for the future or what task should be chosen as the central concern is causing serious reflection. It is at least partially a question of choosing the task that is closest to the urgency of the times and to religious dedication, the task that enables younger persons of the present to feel that they are at the forward edge of life and sharing in the great adventure of the universe.

My own suggestion is that we need religious communities dedicated directly and fully to the Great Work of identifying and fostering the emerging Ecozoic Era in the geo-biological story of the planet Earth. At present the general tendency is to incorporate concern for the earth with concern for peace and justice, thus coming up with the phrase: peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

While such a phrase has its desirable aspects, it avoids the basic issue. It is a continuation of the difficulty that led to the problem in the first place, since Christians have consistently been concerned with divine-human and inter-human relations, with very little concern for human-earth relations. We are overwhelmed with the pathos of the human.

We always begin, not with the universe before us, the primary reality in all our thinking and imagining, but with the Bible. We seem unable to deal with the universe itself as the primary revelation of the divine before there ever was any Bible and as the context in which the Bible itself needs to be interpreted. We are concerned with the Genesis story that we know through reading, not with the story of the universe that we know through observation.

If we cannot deal with the revelatory dimension of the universe in the immediacy of our experience then we reveal our incapacity to deal with the single greatest issue of these times.

We can expect a renewal of existing religious congregations and the rise of vigorous new congregations as soon as we recognize and dedicate ourselves to the Great Work before us, the renewal of the earth as the presence of the Divine. The human and the entire universe exist in intimate relations with each other. Together we constitute a single sacred community.

## Poems and Other Musings

### Thoughts from a Garden

by MARIE THERESE KOCH, SL

And while I was there, I listened to the earth saying:

"I am God's gift to you. If you handle me with care I will supply many of your basic needs."

Then I sat under a tree and listened to the birds.

Bluebird: "Why are these humans cutting down so many of our nesting places, and destroying the sources of our food in the fields?"

Robin: "I guess they haven't learned why God created the universe filled with the sources and sustainers of life."

As a soft breeze began to blow, I began to cough and sneeze. Pollution had contaminated that lovely breath from Heaven. I then uttered this prayer:

"O Divine Source and Sustainer of life, help us to receive Your gifts with reverence and gratitude, and to use them with love; to care for them and preserve them so they may continue to serve the purpose of their being until the end of time." So be it!