

Resources

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a Time to Sow

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Quarterly Reflections by the IHM Sisters of Monroe, Michigan



We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it.
Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves.
— Chief Seattle

Knowing ourselves as Earthlings

Mary Oliver's poetry reveals her loving attention to the creation she encounters in daily life—earth, water, sun and air as well as the species and habitats, human and otherwise, that she comes upon. She says in her book *Thirst*: “Love for the earth and love for you (i.e., God) are having such a long conversation in my heart.” Her poetry emerges from that conversation and invites her readers into a similar conversation.

Thomas Berry, cultural historian and author of *The Universe Story* and *The Great Work*, claims that his life work is rooted in a childhood experience. Near his home, across a creek, there was a meadow surrounded by a stand of trees. This meadow ignited his heart and imagination. He became convinced that whatever was good for that meadow was itself good; whatever caused it diminishment or injury was not good.

Mystics, some scientists and many ordinary people are moved in similar ways. Their receptivity to the beauty, power, magnificence and suffering of humans, other species, and intricate, often stunningly beautiful ecosystems, is oftentimes transformative. It can evoke the vision, energy and stillness needed for the great work of our times: moving from the planet-threatening impacts of the Industrial Age to the planet-renewing efforts of what some call the Green Revolution.

While increasingly exhausting Earth's resources, we have also polluted and overheated our planetary home and the human population balloons perilously. Having enabled a world of haves and have nots, the need for social justice and sustainable living arrangements is a crucial dimension of healing of the Earth. We are in a race with time.

Knowing ourselves/our species as Earthlings — of the Earth, one with the Earth — is a critical change of perspective for many. What Brian Swimme calls the withering of the planet is happening within our own bodies and spirits even as it also depletes and pollutes our cities and farmlands, our water and food supplies. This withering affects every species, ecosystem and bioregion.

Distinguished as a species by conscious self awareness, humans can learn to see and care for the whole and change our behavior as appropriate. It is profoundly hopeful that the “greening” of our minds, hearts, senses and spirituality is enabling increasing numbers

of us to green our behaviors. Many are imagining, creating and using Earth-friendly energy, housing, cars, food, roads, industrial processing, laws, curriculum, cities, etc. We are in the early stages, but a sense of need and urgency and possibility are building.

The most fulsome responses, however, come from self-starting groups worldwide—such as Bioneers, peace groups, Doctors Without Borders, Haiti Reborn, the IHM Motherhouse renovation, etc. Their work often begins by responding to a felt need or problem and slowly grows. Like Mary Oliver, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme and Chief Seattle, their love of Earth and her suffering creatures, including other humans, has stirred within them powerful energies for the healing of the planet.

Mainstreet USA and its government needs similar vision and energy. We need to experience ourselves as Earthlings. We need to recognize and grieve the signs of our planet withering. Even more we need to experience and be part of the green revolution in action—in educational curricula, in the law, in the garden, in the grocery store, in medicine, in building renovation or construction, on the dinner table, in the coming of justice and peace in our world.

—Mary McCann, IHM

Reflections

- 1 Ponder the last paragraph from a personal perspective.
- 2 How do you nurture your love and attention to the Earth?
- 3 What experiences have you had of the withering of Earth? Perhaps a forest, a lake, a field, a person, a neighborhood, etc. Ponder the thoughts, feelings, desires you may have had.