

It Breaks My Heart
By Christine Loughlin, OP

They are gathered in Paris as I write ~ fifty thousand participants. Scientists and innovative business leaders, heads of state and ordinary citizens, UN delegates and environmental groups, artists and youth. They are there to talk about what has been named the greatest concern of our time ~ global warming. Some will advocate for market solutions to solve the problems of environmental degradation. Others, recognizing the multifaceted local efforts already underway, will promote a continued decentralized response. Never before has there been such a harnessing of human energy to awaken a new human behavior

Outside the window stand the slenderest of sticks as if a nor'easter impaled them indiscriminately, until you notice a humped circle of woodchips and leaves encircling each: Jonafree and Goldrush apple, Asian pear, peach and cherry trees newly planted. Beyond the saplings, Wes and Tate, a team of two high schoolers, helped farmer Sam set the asparagus crowns into a deep-dug trench. When Josh arrived with his small bobcat to haul piles of compost onto the seeds and push the heaped-up soil back into the trench, he wistfully said, "It breaks my heart so little attention is given to biology on the MCAS test. The story of plants and soils hardly makes it into the curriculum."

Rejuvenating the land one farm at a time! If you happen upon a map of the national food hub survey, you will notice a defining dot on the eastern rim of Massachusetts. Volume I of the USDA, [Running a Food Hub: Lessons Learned from the Field](#), includes the story of Red Tomato/ righteous produce! We witness the diligent work of the Red Tomato staff laboring to connect farmers and consumers through visionary education and innovative marketing trade. Across the northeast region, from Vermont to Pennsylvania, the "Tomatoes" set up networks of two to five family farms. The farmers then work together to consolidate shipments of fresh produce to our major grocery stores and markets. A logistical miracle—the road to a locally based, ecologically grown, fair-trade food system.

Well before the turn into this century, the wise teacher and learned geologist, Thomas Berry, noted that devastation and losses will mark our way as the planet warms. Yet, his startling insight did not identify climate change as the key crisis, rather the manner in which our largest institutions view the world. He wrote that the exploitation of Earth happens from our cultural disorder, our perceptions of what matters. Our perceptions, or worldview, are rooted in our history, our religion, and our sense of identity.

If there is one thing occurring in Religious Orders today, it is a crisis in identity. Our histories were written with our lives and told through the relationship we formed in the places where we served. Unwittingly, and perhaps even more, uncritically, we embraced the cultural world we found around us and never more than in the latter half of the 20th century. While we creatively, and sometimes courageously, engaged with others to restore values of right, good, and just participation within the human community, we had a limited awareness of the global ecological destruction or the economic and political powers that ignored the devastation. More startling, the religious sentiment that affirmed it.

We slowly awaken to the most significant acknowledgement of all. Often located in places of ecological diversity and healthy environments, we neither took note nor listened to the ancient voices dwelling in a landscape long before our arrival ~ chirping and buzzing, murmuring, the mighty and humble silent voices of 'teachers', 'healers', 'community servants' of living ecosystems, beings of the natural world.

Like those gathered in Paris, none of us will arrive at the answers until we ask the right question ~ what breaks your heart? The Universe came to be and endures by dancing on the edge of the greatest tensions possible. Humans, too, have had to live with the tensions brought forth by our own behaviors and the larger powers beyond our control. We face unprecedented tension as we dwell in conscious awareness of Voices lost never to return and an unfathomable celebration of the Journey of the Universe and our presence in its wild unfolding. We hunger for rituals that will not only foster gratitude but will alter our mode of consciousness toward becoming a new human presence on the planet. Rituals which allow our hearts to break open to an ever widening embrace....

...like the All Beings Confluence, the work of artist Martha Cole and friends. It's a series of long, narrow, sheer panels, over 250 of them, each representing a single living Being – perhaps a ladybug, a blue heron, an oak, or a single blue-green algae who first provided our planet with oxygen. The panels are always installed to fill a whole area and no single panel is ever seen by itself. Each is always “in community” with all other Beings. As one walks among them, they move gently with the currents, merging into different patterns and combinations of color and light. For a brief time one feels herself as part of a vast, complex and interconnected whole.

The challenge for Religious Orders today is to attend to the birth of significantly different human communities intentionally committed to living in harmony with Earth.

*Be still, in the grace of the moment, breathe, be still
Be still, in the terror of the moment, breathe, be still
Be still, in the hope of the moment, breathe, be still
Carolyn McDade*

Neither our present privilege nor acquired power will guide us there, but a humble willingness to bear witness to centers of Life emerging with a new vibrancy.

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