

Time to Awake and Join the Conversation

By Christine Loughlin, OP

As children we loved the feel of falling asleep in a room embraced by the drone of adults conversing. Familiar chatting crooned a lullaby of caring and security.

Today, February 16, the Kyoto Treaty on global warming goes into effect. Seven years in the making and ratified by 141 countries (not the U.S. or Australia) the governments of the world have committed to address the greatest threat that we and all other living beings have ever faced. The atmosphere is filled with pollutants, mostly carbon dioxide. This has come about through our human ingenuity that found the way to extract energy from the fossils of animal and plant life and transform it into fuel. Since all plants and animals contain carbon, the carbon is freed when the fossil fuel burns. Carbon joins with oxygen in the air to become a gas that heightens the temperature of the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide and other contaminants contained in the fuel are dispersed into the air, the soil, and the water resulting in the toxic poisoning of our entire Planet.

We know that the contamination is the result of our industrial and technological capacities developed over the past century that have allowed us to seize control of the natural world. We can exploit every expression of life to serve our human comfort and convenience.

Our American dream now shapes the destiny of the human community as well as the Planet itself. We have forgotten that a long conversation has been underway. Four billion years of critical dialogue among earth and the atmosphere, the great oceans and the multitude of magnificent life forms that swim in the waters or those that have come forth from the sea...including ourselves.

Yes, from an ancient conversation sparked by a primal wisdom, intense beauty and amazing complexity unfolded. Suddenly, peoples and their governments have awakened just in time to realize that one voice in the biosphere, the human, is dominating the conversation. There is no longer a lullaby of well-being humming in the background for the atmosphere has uttered a piercing wail warning impending disaster. The young of every species are already compromised. The question is beyond how to stop global warming, but more—how will we respond to what is now before us?

On the same day the Boston Globe reported that scientists and politicians are beginning to admit the connection between development and devastation, another notice arrived. This one via e-mail. I had just heard that Sister Dorothy Stang, a Sister of Notre Dame who had worked for years in the Amazon, had been murdered. A simple message sent forth to a group came from one of Dorothy's dear friends. Sister Carol Shoup wrote:

I have some very sad news and ask for your silent presence, light, sweet song...

*Dorothy has been working with the poor community in Anapu, Brazil in Para.
...she has been trying to establish with the people a viable and sustainable living
with the beautiful trees of the rainforest.*

But loggers have continually harassed the people with death threats.

There it was! The profound clarity of what it means to live into an Ecological Age. *A viable and sustainable living with the beautiful trees of the rainforest.* Neither is this sentimental or romantic. It is the radical action that announces the way for the human to become conversant once again with the primal order in which Creation unfolds. The tragic truth is that what is

happening to the rainforest, the soils, water and the air is not in violation of our western cultural or moral codes. Our moral measuring stick only extends to our consideration of human interaction. Suddenly, one appears who knows that the sustainable and viable option necessary for Life must include action on behalf of every form of being in the community of life. To sense that human well-being can only go forth in the company of the well-being of the rainforest is a fundamental shift in our way of thinking. To initiate such a radical change in human behavior requires nothing less than that one hazard her life. The atmosphere alerts us that human health is enfolded in the trees of the rainforest.

In the face of what is before us as individuals, as a community, as a species, each of us must now ask the question—where do we hazard our life? Here at Crystal Spring we prepare to begin another season developing a local food system. Our work in the Religious Lands Conservancy project asks that Congregations who responded to the needs of human suffering during the Industrial Era now move beyond meeting human needs and activate a more comprehensive embrace of all manner of suffering.

In cooking and bread baking classes we learn that four billion year journey is there in every morsel. We slow down to consider, to reflect, to recognize the whole source of our nourishment. We know the sacrifice in every bite and grasp that so much giving requires a giving in return. The programs in the arts arouse archetypal energy and we concede that there resides within each of us the primal force that has guided the great transitions to this point. In music and in art we sense the vague outlines that define our species' way toward transformation. But more than all the rest, the woodland waits assurance that we protect the resource that promises *a viable and sustainable life* for all of Creation who make their home in this bioregion.

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