

Silent Spring of the 21st Century

By Christine Loughlin, OP

The roof on the tool shed is repaired. Clippers, hoes, rakes, shovels, and trowels are set out in two categories — the ones that need sharpening and the ones set to go. Trays of seedlings lie below the grow lights lowered to cast the first waves of warmth on tomato, basil, and parsley seeds. Costumes and script are ready for the annual Spring Equinox ritual drama. The redwings are in the field, robins pick the still frozen ground, and the mourning doves coo their soulful lament. Familiar signs of spring, what nature assures and what we add, flourish.

Over the past year visitors often mention the changes they notice as they drive into Plainville. At the intersection of our local route one with the major interstate, the rambling acreage of white pine, cedar, all kinds of scrub brush is cleared. Target, Home Goods, a soon to be another Lowe's and Super Stop and Shop, restaurants and the outdoor sporting world of Cabela's are in the town's plan. From the hill behind our house one can sit and look out in all directions at an altered landscape.

Just about the time I moved to Plainville an economic political worldview was set forth by our national leaders and their counterparts that changed the way 'landscape' across our country would be engaged in the coming decades. Since the oil crisis of the 1970's was behind us, and a new low rate set at \$10/barrel before us, we made the decision to outsource our manufacturing industry and concentrate on suburban land development and the consumer opportunities that such development allowed. Workers around the world converted the natural resources of their land into material goods that were then transported back here and sold at cheap prices. You can observe the results from our hillside. We traded habitat and native species, manufacturing particular to southern New England, and our farmland for large house lots and an excessive number of malls to buy inexpensive articles arriving from foreign countries. Plenty of fast food shops fold in with the outlets. A walk along the front property line and you can identify at least ten on any given day by the trash left along the side of the road.

Spring 2006 finds us in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. We barely recall the hoopla about the turn into the new century — would computers that track and measure our globalized way of life crash, satellite systems fail, food transport around the globe stall. Some people stockpiled. Now 2000 seems long ago. In Boston newspapers and in most sources of communication, printed and spoken, we are jolted by the news that our world in 2006 is very different from the one at the turn of the century. Just six years later we are confronted with the news that where we are going will be different from where we have been. The political and economic decisions of the past quarter century were dependent on cheap oil. What we chose to do with that one time endowment resource has caused a global warming of such magnitude that the systems of the Planet cannot make an adequate response. We thought that the system was something out there. We slowly grasp that the system is something that we enact.

Suddenly people everywhere hear and understand this news. The wisest and best scientists tell us atmospheric changes that are now activated, even if we dramatically end our current practices, have entered a process we cannot change.

While the red buds appear and the wood ducks return to our pond, in the overall arc of our living Planet, a great *requiem* has begun. Into the silence of this *requiem* we insert our Spring rituals. We hear the cry of the Island Peoples in the southern hemisphere as oceans waters rise, feel the heat of scorching winds as desert sands sweep a wider edge. We read the report of the mountain stripped of trees exploding under the weight of torrential rains and all living beings that called the mountain home sink in sea of mud; we see the haunting pictures of beached whales

misguided by sonic blasts. The great rivers of antiquity run dry, the world largest lakes disappear, the inland seas become parched land. Countries unfamiliar a few years ago appear in the news. Kazakhstan, on the Caspian Sea, now must deal with one of the largest oil fields in the world. Oil flows through a pipeline and then freighted all the way to Turkey and on to western markets. In the first year of drilling, 11,000 seals bleeding from nose and mouth, were washed up dead.

Yes, we will mist our seedlings and plant our rows. But our understanding of what Nature assures has greatly altered. We comprehend, with deeper knowing, the sensitive systems of our living Planet. All healthy systems move in harmony. We recognize our human selves as huge players in the biosphere, so big we overrode the sensitive balances not only in the biotic community but even the air and water can not withstand the assault of our skilled industrial ways. In the stunned silence of the great dying we sense a conscious awakening redirecting our human venture.

A crisis in agriculture will be one of the defining modes of global warming. Our work here is to assist young farmers and participate in the local growers' movement. After three decades of landscapes translated into one-time capital gains for consumer culture, will my own soul sense the surrounding *requiem*? When a 'religious' voice states — this is my patrimony — will my soul ripen to utter a language that speaks of a human presence as partakers only in the great communion of Planetary Being?

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