

Sister Earth

Tell all the truth, but tell it slant ... The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every [one] be blind. - Emily Dickenson

First, I feel I need to say something about about the horrific violence that occurred in Paris Friday night. These words by Richard Rohr can get us started:

“There are people who carry death wherever they go, pulling all into their negative force field.

“Etty Hillesum, a Jew in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam wrote, ‘Each of us moves things along in the direction of war, every time we fail to love.’”

The word terrorist means — one who elicits terror in another. Our first reaction to horrific violence is to go to that fear-based place. We want to respond with fear and hatred.

But when we respond with fear, anger, hatred — the terrorists have won. Another response is suggested by Christianity. We want to believe this, with all our hearts:

Hope conquers fear; Love conquers hate

- Hope conquers fear; love conquers hate.
- The arc of God’s movement in the universe is towards justice.

This talk has some further thoughts about fear and love, and the connectedness of everything.

Let us pray:

Prayer: Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, grant us — like you — to suffer and so to rise, to be broken and so to be made whole, to die and so to live. Amen.

Laudato Si’

This is the title of [Pope Francis’ first encyclical](#) — that one came out last May. It is a quote from St. Francis’ Canticle of the Sun: “Laudato si’, mi’ Signore.” His canticle is the basis for our hymn, “All Creatures of Our God and King.” Here’s a translation of “Laudato si’, mi’ Signore.”

All praise be yours ...

All praise be yours my Lord — through Sister Earth, our Mother, Who feeds us, and produces various fruits, with colored flowers and herbs....

St. Francis’ wrote his Canticle of the Sun at the end of his life — the time of great suffering I mentioned last week. He had leprosy, he was going blind, he was very depressed. They applied red-hot irons to his eyeballs to see if that would cure his blindness. It didn’t.

And yet, he wrote these words: All praise to you, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our Mother. *Was he out of touch with reality? Or was he in touch with another reality?*

Pope Francis continues:

This sister

“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

“We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.

“The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, the water, the air and in all forms of life.

We have forgotten

“We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

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This is what [environmentalist Joanna Macy](#) says about where we are with our environment.

Joanna Macy

We are not just on the way to destroying the world — we’ve actually been on that path for quite a while. But we are beginning to wake up ... to a whole new relationship — to our world, to ourselves, and to each other.

Richard Rohr says: “I regret to say that there has been a *massive loss of hope*

Loss of hope

in Western history — a hope that was evident in people like St. Francis, Julian of Norwich, and others.

He continues, “Are not the World Wars of Christian countries a clear sign of this loss? Are not the genocides of *this* century surely a symptom of deep self-loathing and fear.”

At the Francis Factor conference, Ilia Delio said, “we got all our theology through the scholastic method. We are

Right-brain starved

‘right-brain starved.’ We have analyzed the world to death.

Scarcity, Fear, Out-of-sync

She goes on, “The left brain is the brain of scarcity and fear. We have split mind and matter — and it’s definitely mind over matter. We are a world machine and the machine is broken. Our narrow individualism has left us out of sync with nature.”

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Franciscanism offers us a way out of this alienation from Creation, from each other and even from ourselves — a way that is both ancient and modern. First, the ancient:

Pre-Axial Consciousness

Historian Karl Jaspers called the connection that pre-historic people had with Creation — “Pre-Axial Consciousness.” [The Axial Age](#) he describes happened around 800 BC to 200 BC. The new consciousness manifested itself in many cultures during that time. It was a

movement of discovery of our uniqueness, of thought itself — theology, philosophy, and the arts. Pre-Axial peoples

They do not believe

... did not believe that they end at their skin — or their fingertips. The earth as mother was real to them. They had a sense of the interconnection of everything.”

Anthropologists find the same kind of consciousness in aboriginal peoples today. So they experience the Oneness of Everything, the Univocity of Being.

Univocity of Being

I was sitting on my patio one late fall afternoon, watching the sun shine through things, making shadows, blinding me. I noticed the leaf of an okra plant nearby.

Okra Leaf

I was doing what retired people do best — looking at stuff — and the sun was doing what the it does best — shining through things. The leaf was valiantly living our the end of its life and giving me an incredible visual experience.

The colors and patterns of the leaf burned themselves on the back of my eyes. They streamed into my heart.

And my gaze was also streaming — toward the leaf.

I asked myself then, and I ask you now: where did the leaf end and where did I begin? Where was the bright line that separated me from the leaf? Where did my container end and the leaf’s container begin?

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Roman Vishniac found the Oneness of Everything taking photographs through a microscope.

Roman Vishniac - 1887-1990

Janette and I attended a marvelous lecture by a UT historian on the The spirituality of Mark Rothko and Roman Vishniac. Both were Russian Jews who emigrated to the U.S. just before WW II. This was in connection with two exhibits at the MFAH, which are still going on. Just a bit on Rothko:

Mark Rothko

Before the holocaust Rothko was painting in the surrealist style that was popular then. After WW II he began to explore a new vision of beauty by looking up and out.

Rothko Slide

This is one of the paintings that hangs in the exhibit in the MFAH. Again, I encourage you to go see the exhibit and the exhibit of Roman Vishniac’s photos.

Roman Vishniac - 1887-1990

Vishniac became well-known during WW II and after. He took pictures of Eastern European Jews. His exhibits were well-attended.

Photo of European Jewish Boys

But Vishniac's heart was pulling him toward what he called photo-micrographs — photos taken through a microscope. He found under the microscope a new world of beauty and life — a stark contrast to his photographs of pre-Holocaust Europe.

He would go to Central Park in NYC to scoop up water from one of the lakes. Back in his apartment, he would put a drop of the water on a slide and examine the life in the drop of water. He said this was art, not science. We can understand this when we look at some of his micro-photographs:

Vishniac color slide 01

Vishniac color slide 02

He never put a glass cover on his slide. His friends asked why. "Because it would crush the little heads of the amoebas, and force their little arms straight out from their bodies." His friends made fun of this. Here is a video he made of one of these little dancing creatures, a parasite!

Vishniac Video

After he was done taking pictures, Vishniac would put the drop of water back in the jar and return the water back to the exact spot where he found it, in the lake. Again he was asked why he did this.

"I am returning the creature to its family. Surely the destruction of families is one of the most horrific crimes of all time," he explained. His extended family died in the Holocaust, as did Rothko's.

St. Francis picked up little worms and walked gently on stones. Roman Vishniac returned little amoebas to their families. They felt univocity of being.

Univocity of Being

By univocity, Duns Scotus meant that we can speak with *one consistent and true voice* about a rock, a tree, an animal, a human, an angel, and God!

Now, about the extremely modern side of univocity of being, quantum mechanics:

Quantum entanglement

[Quantum entanglement](#) is a physical phenomenon that occurs when pairs or groups of particles are generated or interact in ways such that the quantum state of each particle cannot be described independently. Instead, a quantum state may be given for the pair or group.

When pairs are separated, sometimes by comparatively great distances, it appears that when one is affected by the scientist, the other one, blocks away, responds to the stimulus also.

There is no physical connection between the particles. Yet there seems to be some kind of force field that enables the pair to communicate. They are still entangled, even when separated.

Einstein proved that we are more than matter, that stars, constellations, plants, animals, rocks, the Earth itself — we are also energy, and our energies are connected. Once again, we're back to univocity of being.

Could it be — that this is what happens when we pray for someone?

Ilia Delio goes further; she says we must drop our fears and become more “entangled” with the cosmos — as Franciscans do — with little worms, with rocks, with each other, with the Other, with the cosmos itself. St. Francis met Christ in the face of the leper.

She says, “We must break our hearts open to experience compassion for all beings, including earth’s creatures. We will have a sensitivity to the fragility of nature.”

Quantum physics suggests that if we share compassion, even prayer, we impact the cosmos. We impact others with our prayers, but also with our curses.

What is wrong with the world? I am.

It seems that quantum mechanics, and the experience of so-called primitive peoples, suggest that everything is connected, and that we have a great impact to make, even with our prayers for others.

Love is stronger ... The arc of the universe ...

- Love is stronger than hate.

Here’s a final video, showing how one species affects others, and even the geography around it:

[How Wolves Changed the Rivers](#)

Sister Earth slide