

# AWAKENING THE CARTESIAN DREAMER

## Universal Values in Solidarity with an Evolutionary Universe

Orla O'Reilly Hazra ♦

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth our home, is alive with a unique community of life...The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems...The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust...To realize these aspirations we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities...The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

*Preamble, Earth Charter*

### 1. Introduction

In relation to cosmology/educational philosophy the article is organized around four questions: 1. Where are we? 2. How did we get here? 3. What is possible now? 4. Where do we go from here? These four questions and the title for this article are adopted from the Awakening the Dreamer: Changing the Dream Symposium (ATD) developed by the Pachamama Alliance.<sup>1</sup> I recently facilitated ATD symposiums in seven locations around India<sup>2</sup> with Sr Gail Worcelo<sup>3</sup> and her colleague from Indonesia,

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<sup>1</sup>The Pachamama Alliance [www.pachamama.org](http://www.pachamama.org) was founded in 1996 by the initiation of the indigenous Achuar peoples in South America with the 'people of the north.' The oppression of the people and land is based on a faulty dream of a particular understanding of progress and development. By awakening from this dream Earth communities can join with indigenous people to 'revitalize the commons.'

<sup>2</sup>Over 500 people attended the symposia. I am very grateful to our hosts and communities. Mumbai: St Xavier's College, Jivanikas Sadan, Kotayam, CSI, Goa: PBVM and CSC, Bangalore: Fireflies and Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Patna: Tarumitra and New Delhi: Vidyajyoti.

Ami Hendani. The goal for the symposium is to foster an environmentally sustainable, socially just and spiritually fulfilling human presence on the planet. My narrative research dissertation traced the patterns of somatic alienation, awakening and connection back to Earth happening around the world, itself a pattern of conversion and facilitated by a conversation of a fourfold wisdom.<sup>4</sup> The four questions serve two functions within the process of conversion: 1. as containers for information regarding cosmology, educational philosophy and life practice, and 2. as the structure for facilitating the re-centring of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power.

## 2. Where Are We?<sup>5</sup>

We are part of a vast evolving Universe, living in an interdependent community named Earth. Currently, many readers of this issue and I rely on the various bioregions that collectively are named India. Distant readers belong and rely on far away bioregions, yet each of these diverse bioregions contributes to the collective health of the living organism, Earth, a.k.a. Gaia<sup>6</sup> which sustains us. The Gaia theory

invites us to engage not with life on earth, but rather, with the life-form that is the Earth. Our Earth is not an object to be exploited, but a living organism inviting our dialogue and participation... We resent anything that points to the fact that something other than ourselves is in charge, that we are meant to be a servant species at the service of a greater organism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Sr Gail is co-foundress of Green Mountain Monastery in Vermont, USA: [www.greenmountainmonastery.org](http://www.greenmountainmonastery.org). She was mentored by Thomas Berry (1914-2009) [www.thomasberry.org](http://www.thomasberry.org)) for over 20 years and founded the monastery with him. Along with the ATD symposium, Sr Gail presented her research, 'Moments of Grace.'

<sup>4</sup>The fourfold wisdom suggested by Thomas Berry is the conversation of the wisdoms of science, religion, women and indigenous peoples. See Question Three.

<sup>5</sup>The first question "Where Are We" in the ATD symposium asks attendees to face, as a group, the scope and urgency of the current global social, environmental and spiritual crises, and to understand them as interconnected facets of one crisis...not three separate issues. Extensive information from around the globe is offered to show the extent of the crisis. My interest is to show 'where we are' in our cosmology.

<sup>6</sup>The *Gaia* hypothesis, developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, presents Earth as a living ecosystem. Instead of repetitive mechanical processes, Earth now presents herself as an intricate self-regulating system. Gaia is the term the Greeks used for Earth and considered her a Goddess.

<sup>7</sup>D. O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997, 201-202. Geneticist and

“Where are we?” in relation to this understanding, is the overall focus of this article. We may or may not be living from this perspective or we might be wondering about how to foster this perspective. ‘Whereness’ is crucial to our identity. John O’Donohue claims, and asks us “Why then is it so rarely noticed? Why is it so rarely considered to be a presence? Why is it abused, raided and raped?”<sup>8</sup> It is because many have lost their identity of being ‘dust to dust’ and of the soil.

The preamble from the Earth Charter<sup>9</sup> at the beginning of the article serves as an anchor for a particular design and understanding of adulthood as well as the values, aspirations, and responsibilities of that adult community. The Earth Charter statement is an understanding and faith in the ‘integrity of creation’ and expression of values to fuel life practices to conserve the integrity of creation. It is a mystical orientation.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, many do not aspire to these ideals, as their current cosmology is not from an ecological perspective.

Religious educator Gabriel Moran<sup>11</sup> links cosmology and educational philosophy: ‘Ideals of adulthood can be co-related to educational systems.

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Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock urged her students in the biological sciences to develop “*a feeling for the organism.*” McClintock’s vision, explored in a book by the same name by Evelyn Fox Keller, has been the inspiration for many in a wide diversity of academic fields (theology, education, aesthetics, and systems theory) who acknowledge our Cartesian dilemma.

<sup>8</sup>J. O’Donohue, *The Four Elements: Reflections on Nature*, New York: Harmony Books, 2010, 129.

<sup>9</sup>The Earth Charter is a universal expression of ethical principles and has been recognized by UNESCO as an important ethical framework for sustainable development. The Earth Charter Initiative is the global network that embraces uses and integrates it into their institutions. [www.earthcharterinaction](http://www.earthcharterinaction).

<sup>10</sup>The relationship between the mystical and political dimensions of existence is documented in Janet Ruffing, ed., *Mysticism and Social Transformation*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001. Roger Gottlieb, in this volume, presents deep ecology as a movement with roots in mystical consciousness in the chapter “The Transcendence of Justice and the Justice of Transcendence: Mysticism, Deep Ecology and Political Life.” See also his book *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature and Environment*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>11</sup>Throughout his career, Gabriel Moran has addressed the issue of cosmology, through the lens of educational philosophy and religious education. Moran developed a two sided model of religious education, (to teach religion and to teach to be religious) which captures the dynamic of cosmology, our chicken and egg issue. Moran is still misunderstood by many in the field of religious education who assume religious education is restricted to what happens in a classroom and/or restricted to

Which comes first is a chicken-or-egg question. The ideal is embodied in the pattern of education while that education continually reinforces the ideal.”<sup>12</sup> We face a deep rooted educational crisis. Moran’s analogy reveals that the process<sup>13</sup> of cosmology/education extends much farther than the schoolroom. It is intergenerational, international, and intra-religious.

To reinforce the understanding that cosmology and educational philosophy are linked I will simplify and use an abbreviation from now on “coed.” Because of space, time and more importantly language constraints based on cosmology, I have limited my observations and analysis of coed to schools.<sup>14</sup> However this same analysis could be done with families, work place or recreation setting. The analysis of curriculum design in schools presents for view the design of our overall cosmology, our ideals and values, which are intangible and difficult to measure.<sup>15</sup>

By uncovering the ideals and values embodied in adults and inherited by children as they learn life practices our problems of social justice, environmental sustainability and spiritual fulfilment can be seen as an educational issue – as a faulty cosmology. Knowing our cosmology is faulty anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson wondered “What is heresy?...that it is possible to be epistemologically wrong? Wrong at the very root of thought?”<sup>16</sup> Theologian Elizabeth Johnson describes our fundamental task to heal this heresy:

The damage can begin to be healed only by conversion, meant here in the biblical sense of *metanoia*, a turning around. We must allow

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religious texts, personalities, etc. I have used his model to show the process of Cartesian conversion in *Evoking the Spirit to Practice Religiously: Somatic and Narrative Ways of Knowing for Transformative Learning in a Living Tradition* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, New York: Fordham University, 2009) and “The Universe Story: Fostering a Faith in the Integrity of Creation and Responsible Life Practice” *Krystu Jyoti* 26, 4(2010), 353-373.

<sup>12</sup>Moran G., *Education toward Adulthood*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1979, 34.

<sup>13</sup>Cosmology is our fundamental epistemology, an active process of consciousness. We co-create the world based on our epistemology. Currently we are co-creating in ways that are fundamentally unconscious of our ‘whereness’.

<sup>14</sup>There has been an emerging flood of research in schooling practices critiquing Cartesian cosmology in school rooms (including adult learning) as if this is the only place where people are taught. While this is a good start, it ignores the overall process that teaches.

<sup>15</sup>Curriculum design analysis will be addressed in question three.

<sup>16</sup>G. Bateson, and M. C. Bateson, *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred*, New York: Bantam, 1988, 23.

ourselves to be converted to the patterns established by the Spirit in the giving of life itself. What is crucial for a viable future is a religious spirit that converts us to the Earth...Coherent with feminist and other liberation spiritualities, being converted to the Earth entails the mutually fertilizing elements of contemplation and prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

James Fowler defines conversion as “a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action.”<sup>18</sup>

In particular reference to *dharma* and conversion in Sanskrit literature T. S. Rukmani writes:

Sanskrit literature conveys the dominant world view of *dharma*, which is ecologically friendly. It is also important to define the kind of human being who can fit into the ecologically friendly universe. It is the kind of individual whom we might call an “ecoperson” and whom the Hindus call a *dharmic* individual: one who can live in harmony with nature as a whole. The stress here is on the inner transformation of an individual, a transformation which allows the sharing of the planet and its resources in a sense of mutuality.<sup>19</sup>

To significantly re-centre ourselves back to Earth, adopt a new set of master stories, and becoming a *dharmikah* we first need to bring to consciousness the values and ideals which currently motivate us. We need to review the unexamined assumptions within our current heresy. The second question of our process in the next section is crucial for any kind of awakening and transformation of our current cosmology and values.

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<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit: Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1993, 63.

<sup>18</sup>James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco: Harper, 1995, 281-282. Fowler writes about faith development, but not from the perspective of a culture that promotes a faith in the integrity of creation. From an ecofeminist perspective I would base my critique on his underlying cosmology and understanding of adulthood. Though a Cartesian cosmology is practiced within many religious institutions, the responsibility for the development of a ‘religious’ understanding is far wider than our current understanding of religious institutions. His words defining faith and conversion do allow us to capture the movement from a Cartesian cosmology to a Gaian cosmology, our global awakening.

<sup>19</sup>T. S. Rukmani, “Literary Foundations for an Ecological Aesthetic: Dharma, Ayurveda, the Arts and *Abhijnanasakuntalam*” in M.E. Tucker and C. K. Chappel, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000, 110-111

### 3. How Did We Get Here?<sup>20</sup>

“We got here” as the result of a 13.7 billion years cosmogenesis? We are descendants of the stars, literally star dust. Our coed does not recognize, believe and understand this sense of interconnection and on-going Divine creativity. This has had a profound impact on our environmental, social and spiritual lives, where we are in our coed. Our issue is a religious one as summarized by Gregory Bateson:

Most of us have lost that sense of unity of biosphere and humanity which would bind and reassure us all with an affirmation of beauty...We have lost the core of Christianity. We have lost Shiva, the dancer of Hinduism whose dance at the trivial level is both creation and destruction but in whole is beauty...There have been, and still are, in the world many different and even contrasting epistemologies which have been alike in stressing an ultimate unity and, although this is less sure, which have also stressed the notion that ultimate unity is aesthetic. I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. I believe that that mistake may be more serious than all the minor insanities that characterize those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity.<sup>21</sup>

Children are being shaped for a materialistic and consumption oriented lifestyle to support this economic globalization by their elders in four universal educational forms: family, school, work and recreation. This educational philosophy and dysfunctional cosmology has resulted in a sense of alienation from various aspects of self, each other, Earth, and the divine. The ideal of adulthood and accompanying values are that of a rational and autonomous individual, independent, competitive and liberated to achieve her/his personal goals (a.k.a. anthropocentric). Walter Brueggemann calls this way of being ‘royal consciousness,’ urging his readers to consider their own cultural formation and links educational philosophy with cosmology.

Perhaps you like me, are so enmeshed in this reality that another way is nearly unthinkable...We are all children of the royal consciousness.

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<sup>20</sup>This section of ATD intends to awaken participants from the cultural trance they have fallen under as individuals and society through understanding the causal relationship between the trance and the dream of the modern world. One exercise is to identify unconscious, unexamined assumptions that perpetuate the dream trance and recognize a ‘blessed unrest.’

<sup>21</sup>Bateson G., *Mind and Nature*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002, 16-17.

All of us, in one way or another, have deep commitments to it. So the first question is: How can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation? In the language of R.D. Laing, people must simply practice the proper behavior because they are no longer able to experience their own experience...Clearly, the regime is interested not in what people experience but in their behavior, which can be managed.<sup>22</sup>

This style of consciousness is also known as Cartesian cosmology.

#### 4. Cartesian Cosmology

The term Cartesian cosmology is used to define a world view, style of consciousness, and life practice. It emerged from an inadequate understanding of matter itself. In scientific terms it is also known as deterministic materialism:

... a world view that emerged in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century and 17<sup>th</sup> century amidst intense debates over natural philosophy. It had three tenets: That all things in the universe were composed of tiny particles of matter; that these particles were purely material, without any degree of subjectivity; and these particles moved according to fixed, mathematical laws.<sup>23</sup>

While scientists Galileo, Newton and Bacon had developed a new understanding of matter, philosopher Rene Descartes concluded that the mind exists only in humans and matter is passive and inert. Humans had thoughts and feelings while the rest of Earth operated like a machine. Humans then set about culturally to control the Earth. It is a reductionist and mechanistic world view which objectifies and ranked objects with no consideration of the spirit incarnate. This is our current ‘royal consciousness.’

Cartesian coed is based on a sense of radical separation from aspects of self, each other and Earth. This type of somatic numbness and cultural compliance is problematic. It has developed over time (in particular since the Industrial Revolution<sup>24</sup>) to the extent that the earth is no longer

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<sup>22</sup>Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press 2001, 36-41.

<sup>23</sup>Swimme and Tucker, *Journey of the universe*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, 104.

<sup>24</sup>Susan Bordo notes that this development, born in the Cartesian era out of the maternal universe of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, is the birth of a sense of “the separate self, conscious of itself and of its own distinctness from a world “outside” it...It is a psychological birth of inwardness of subjectivity of locatedness in space and time generating new anxieties and ultimately new strategies for maintaining

considered sacred. Cartesian culture is secular.<sup>25</sup> The style of dualistic consciousness separates seemingly separate facets of existence and preference to each ideologically and in life practice: Nature/society, Matter/mind, Body/soul, Female/male, Sensuousness/intellect, Black/white, East/west, Human/God, Earth/heaven, Bad/good, Subjective/objective, Community/individual, Inner/outer, Profane/sacred, Secular/religious, Lateral/linear, Dionysus/Apollo. Theologian Sallie McFague summarizes the consequences of such a cosmology:

Christians have often not been allowed to feel at home on the earth, convinced over centuries of emphasis on otherworldliness that they belong somewhere else – in heaven or another world. The profound ascetic strain within the tradition that has feared too close association with human bodies has extended this as well to other animals and the body of the earth.<sup>26</sup>

Although McFague's statement addresses Christianity, it could easily be read as Cartesian Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, etc. For, globally, we have the necessity for *metanoia* within each of the faith traditions. Diarmuid O'Murchu states clearly that our alienation and dysfunctional practices to deal with it, including their correctives, are culturally fostered. He states:

More than anything else our disconnection from the earth is probably the severest form of pain we know today. The problem is that most people don't feel it consciously. We have invented a vast array of sedatives, drugs, alcohol, hedonism, workaholism, religiosity and pseudo-therapies to rationalize our alienation.<sup>27</sup>

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equilibrium in an utterly changed and alien world." S. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, 7.

<sup>25</sup>The popular usage of the term 'secular' seems to have evolved to mean avoiding the promotion of a particular religion. I am using the term to mean the adoption of 'secular' habits. In contrast to a faith in the 'integrity of creation,' a religious understanding of all faith traditions, Cartesian coed now practiced through a Hindu, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. effectively secularizes "to dissociate from religious or spiritual concerns, convert to material and temporal purposes; turn (a person, etc.) from a religious or spiritual state to worldliness" (*Shorter Oxford*). It is remarkable how convoluted our understanding of religion has become!

<sup>26</sup>McFague, *The Body of God*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993, 102.

<sup>27</sup>O'Murchu, *Transformation of Desire: How Desire Became Corrupted and How We Can Reclaim It?* New York: Orbis Books, 2007, 49.



The consequences of our cosmology emanate from values, attention and consciousness that are explicit and operational as well as those that are tacit. Addressing what is considered ‘sacred’ is crucial but difficult. “The sense of the sacred in any civilization is precisely that which cannot be questioned, for the sense of the sacred is the unquestionable answer to all questions.”<sup>28</sup> One way of capturing the inheritance of Cartesian cosmology and concurrent values is through the field of curriculum studies.

Our educational institutions (family, school, work and recreation) teach three curricula: the explicit, implicit and null curriculum. In Cartesian culture personal identity is equated with nationalism, consumerism, success and possessing the symbols of social hierarchical status and power. Types of attention, awareness, and skill competence necessary for industrial progress and development are explicitly and implicitly fostered. For those of us interested in shaping a cosmology from an ecological perspective Maria Harris states the importance of addressing the null curriculum:

The null curriculum is a paradox. This is the curriculum that exists because it does not exist. It refers to areas left out and procedures left out. And the point of naming it and including it here is critical; ignorance is not neutral. Not being educated in something skews our perceptions, limits our alternatives, narrows our options.<sup>29</sup>

In Cartesian culture the sense of unity, mystery, awe, wonder and responsibility for a collective goal of sustainability is suppressed. That is Cartesian culture’s null curriculum. Our ignorance shows in our various issues identified in Question One. In contrast, reveals Native American theologian Tink Tinker: “the particular gift of Native Americans (and of other indigenous peoples) is an immediate awareness and experience of the sacredness and interdependence of all creation.”<sup>30</sup>

In India, these Cartesian explicit beliefs and implicit values are confirmed in the 12 March 2012 Ministry of Human Resource Development Report to the People on Education, “The spread of education in society is at the foundation of success in today’s globalised world,

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<sup>28</sup>Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 149, 1988.

<sup>29</sup>Harris, “Teaching: Forming and Transforming Grace” in C. Ellis Nelson, ed., *Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988, 245.

<sup>30</sup>Tinker, “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance.” *The Ecumenical Review* 41, 4, (1989), 527-536. This difference will be clarified further in question Three.

where the real wealth of a country is not in its tangible natural resources but in knowledge, which is the driver of economic development.”<sup>31</sup> This recent report shows that the Ministry is ignorant of the implications of their ideals and values. There is certainly no reverence for Earth our home of tangible natural resources, there is no compliance with the Earth Charter nor the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development! The statement betrays an understanding that humans are decoupled from their environment.<sup>32</sup> The development of ‘knowledge,’ the development of the mind is viewed as the resource with priority to be ‘developed’ and made competitive. There is no recognition of ‘where’ knowledge originates. Yet, we know that without natural resources – water, fertile soils, human beings and the other life forms – harmony and balance will perish and indeed are perishing.

These public or development projects in India have resulted in the tribals losing land and livelihood. Without the conservative life practices of the tribals, the land is raped and pillaged for ‘resources’ in support of globalized development. “Poverty, indignity, misery and distress in the tribal areas may not be due to lack of economic growth but rather paradoxically it is because of it.”<sup>33</sup> Political unrest is evident across the nation and an increasing amount of land now lays barren, water contaminated or gone completely and human suffering is increasing.

Globally we are in a massive extinction of species, not seen since 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs vanished from Earth because of the aftermath of a meteor collision with Earth. Many wonder why this is not front page news. This current extinction and massive human suffering is the result of the unbridled activities of the human beings driven by the dream of a dysfunctional cosmology. The 65 million year Cenozoic era, which gave birth to the human beings, 6 million years ago, is ending. For progress to be

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<sup>31</sup>*Report to the People on Education*, www.mhrd.gov.in accessed on 26 April, 2012.

<sup>32</sup>The mission statement for the US Department of Education has a similar vision of the need for competitive skills. It states “ED’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.” www.ed.gov/about/landing.jhtml accessed on 10 May 2012. It has not been amended since I downloaded it originally in 2007! No wonder we have such difficulties communicating in the Rio, Copenhagen summits!

<sup>33</sup>Dias, *Development and Its Human Cost*, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2012, 145. The focus of the investigation is to research the links of social and environmental oppression through the lens of development. As a lawyer, the author’s interest is also to show how this idea of development is embedded and practiced within the legal system with disastrous consequences for the tribal groups and their bioregions.

valid it must include the entire Earth in all its aspects. We cannot designate the plundering of the planet as ‘progress.’ This is a distortion.

The crucial move for humanity to make now is to heal this sense of alienation and royal Cartesian consciousness and move to a communion and religious consciousness giving birth to a new sustainable Ecozoic<sup>34</sup> era. Only then will we be able to evoke the psycho spiritual resources to establish reciprocity of humans with Earth. This same sentiment can be seen to underlie various documents from the United Nations, in particular those from the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a vision of education that seeks to balance *human* and economic well-being with *cultural traditions* and respect for the *earth’s* natural resources. ESD applies *transdisciplinary* educational methods and approaches to develop an ethic for *lifelong learning*; fosters respect for human needs that are compatible with sustainable use of natural resources and the needs of the planet; and nurtures a sense of *global solidarity*. ESD integrates concept and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines to help people better *understand* the world in which they live.<sup>35</sup>

These documents and others with a similar call have been in circulation for a long time. They have been ineffective because the fundamental problem of cosmology has not been addressed. Because the idea of education is still linked with schools and not with coed; our chicken-or-egg dilemma persists. By inserting the word ‘cosmology’ in the above ESD quote we have a statement which would fit in any family, school, work place or recreation. For example, ‘Families and corporations for sustainable development is based on a cosmology that seeks to balance...’ Establishing a global solidarity, in contrast to the dream of Cartesian citizenship is crucial and directly linked with the process of a perceptual awakening.

Climate chaos, brutal economic inequality, and social disintegration are jointly pushing human communities to the brink. We can either let the processes of destruction, disintegration and extermination continue unchallenged or we can unleash our creative energies to

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<sup>34</sup>*Ecozoic Era* is a term coined by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme in *Universe Story* to mean our emerging geologic and cultural time when humans live in unity with nature instead of exploiting it and endangering all. It is based on a consciousness of our shared ancestry and interdependence with Earth.

<sup>35</sup>UNESCO, 2010, “ESD in Brief,” accessed on 10 May 2012 from <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images> “Faith Traditions and Sustainable Development,” Rick Clugston.

make systematic change and reclaim our future as a species, as part of the earth family. We can either keep sleepwalking to extinction or wake up to the potential of the planet and ourselves.<sup>36</sup>

Awakening the Cartesian dreamer is the key for a cosmology from an ecological perspective.

### **5. What Is Possible for the Future?**<sup>37</sup>

It may be that the “new environmental ethic” toward which so many environmental philosophers aspire – an ethic that would lead us to respect and heed not only the lives of our fellow humans but also the life and well-being of the rest of nature – will come into existence not primarily through the logical elucidation of new philosophical principles and legislative strictures, but through a renewed attentiveness to this perceptual dimension that underlies all our logic, through a rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us. Such recuperation is, perhaps, already underway.<sup>38</sup>

To heal our alienation we need to shift our understanding and root metaphor<sup>39</sup> from Cartesianism (the autonomous individual) to that of being a participant in an interdependent ecological system, Earth, and an open evolving universe. This shifting reshapes values and heals the Cartesian heresy. To do this Berry suggested a “fourfold wisdom” to guide us into the future. To help recover and become responsible to a deeper dimension of existence the wisdoms of science, religion, tribal’s/indigenous and

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<sup>36</sup>V. Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in a Time of Climate Change*, Cambridge: South End Press, 2008, 144.

<sup>37</sup>In ATD symposium question three gives a chance for participants to be energized and inspired by the emerging groundswell of committed action around the world, giving birth to a new society in relation to environmental sustainability, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment. This is hope in action responding to ‘blessed unrest.’

<sup>38</sup>D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, New York: First Vintage Books, 1996, 69.

<sup>39</sup>C. A. Bowers has consistently written on the need to address our underlying cosmology when considering efforts of sustainable education. Bowers is also aware of the dangers of critical and liberation pedagogies for ignoring cultural patterns available that can be retrieved for sustainable living; e.g. religious traditions, indigenous wisdom, etc. which are examples of “intergenerational knowledge and systems of mutual support that enable individuals and communities to be less dependent on consumerism.” C. A. Bowers, *Mindful Conservatism: Rethinking the Ideological and Educational Basis of an Ecologically Sustainable Future*, Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, 158.

women are placed in conversation with each other.<sup>40</sup> Each has made a contribution toward the rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us.

The wisdom of science, the 13.7 billion year Universe Story shows that we are bound together and do not live in a static mechanistic cosmos as understood by the Enlightenment scientists and philosophers. We live in an on-going cosmogenesis.

Both life and mind are manifestations of the same set of systemic properties, a set of processes that represent the dynamics of self-organization;...mind and matter no longer appear to belong to two fundamentally separate categories as Descartes believed, but can be seen to represent merely different aspects of the same universal process.<sup>41</sup>

The awareness and awe that mind/Earth/Spirit is an integrated whole is a revelation for our times. Over the 13.7 billion years, the universe entered into ‘thresholds’ of increasing complexity. The thresholds of the Universe Story identified by scientists to date have been: origins of the universe, origins of stars and galaxies, death of stars, formation of solar system and Earth, evolution of life, appearance of human beings, transition to agriculture/sub-threshold, first cities and states, and industrial revolution and fossil fuels. Our bodies are citations to earlier thresholds. Our existence is a story, it is a narrative of on-going co-creation, unlike previous religious stories where God created the world and then finished after our arrival. “We are the progeny of a storied universe.”<sup>42</sup>

A feature of great importance for developing a cosmology from an ecological perspective is the radical interrelatedness and interdependence of all aspects of the science story. It is a common story and one uniting

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<sup>40</sup>This conversation is seen at Yale University, USA in the development of a Master’s degree in Religion and Ecology, collaboration between the schools of Divinity and Environment. At Dominican College, California, all students are required to take a course in ‘Big History’ (the Universe Story) and all course work at the college is placed in conversation with the Story. Microsoft Bill Gates has funded a curriculum development project in 2012 at the College and in Australia the first International Big History Association meeting will be held in August 2012 for educators to share notes and ideas on how to teach the Story, as well as the implications of the Story on any of our life practices. The 2011 “*Journey of the Universe*” film is being viewed on all Public Broadcasting System stations across the US and was recently nominated for an Emmy award for best documentary.

<sup>41</sup>Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, London: Harper Collins, 1983, 315.

<sup>42</sup>O’Murchu, *Quantum Theology*, 16.

living and non-living matter. It undercuts our Cartesian notions of separateness and alienation, we came out of Earth. The common creation story is public in character, non-sectarian, and not limited, like religions, to their adherents. The story suggests that our primary loyalty “should not be to nation or religion, but to the Earth and its Creator (albeit that Creator may be understood in different ways)...Were that reality to sink into human consciousness all over the world, not only war among human beings but ecological destruction would have little support in reality.”<sup>43</sup>

Six universal core values<sup>44</sup> held within the world's religious and indigenous traditions have emerged through a three year conversation sponsored at Harvard University. These universal values are ‘reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility and renewal.’ The values were identified as a result of a series of conferences and publications involving 600 scholars, religious leaders and environmental activists between 1996 and 1998. The collaborative project was initiated by the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard for exploring the various world religions and their relation to ecology. The contents of religious texts and rituals of religions were reviewed for their ecological sensitivity, a ‘green exegesis.’ The project resulted in a series of edited books e.g. *Jainism and Ecology*, *Christianity and Ecology*, *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology*, *Hinduism...*, *Islam...*, *etc.*, and *Ecology*. Each tradition was reviewed to see its mandate for cosmology through an ecological lens (a religious vision) and its potential for fostering awakening. Mary Evelyn Tucker and her husband John Grim facilitated this and then formed the Forum on Religion and Ecology ([www.fore.research.yale.edu](http://www.fore.research.yale.edu)). The Forum is the largest international multi-religious project of its kind.

Many around the globe have embraced this type of analysis and it does turn the attention of theologians from the heavens and back to earth, away from a personal redemption and towards the redemption of Earth.

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<sup>43</sup>McFague, “An Earthly Theological Agenda” in Carol Adams, ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, New York: Continuum Books, 1993, 93.

<sup>44</sup>Mary Evelyn Tucker reiterated the importance of these universal values in a 20 April 2012 panel response to a keynote lecture given by Amartya Sen “Towards an Ethos of Inclusion: A Contribution to the Post-2015 Development Dialogue”. Sen’s concern was the decoupling of economics and policy making from moral and conscientious reflection. By focusing on cosmology it is easy to show that because of humanity’s decoupling from Earth, it is understandable that our values are not supportive of a particular kind of moral and conscientious reflection. [www.ustream.tv/recorded/21986213](http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/21986213)

Traditional interpretations of right relationships with God, self and neighbour are expanded from a new context, Earth – our oppressed neighbours, creatures and Earth, a stewardship model of citizenship. This stewardship model may still risk the perpetuation of an anthropocentric focus when not in conversation with the story of science. It is the decentring and recentring of the humans back into Earth, an eco-identity revealed through our story, which will ensure Earth stewardship. The story of science offers humanity another origin story, relation to its source and breaks down religious sectarianism.

Theologians from an ecofeminist perspective are writing to help people to understand the God/world relationship consonant with contemporary views of reality as supplied by science. The realization that the cosmos is not static and that it is still unfolding with Divine energy invites us to new possibilities. Humanity, with this awareness of molecular interconnection, a.k.a. ‘integrity of creation,’ is being invited to co-create in a sustainable way in this transition time. The response to the magnificence and grandeur of the process becomes the energy and “response-ability” to ensure its continuity. Knowing we are stardust, from an earlier threshold, this redefinition of self, a universal Earth membership, expands our notion of “social” and social responsibility. Elizabeth Johnson summarizes the vision of ecofeminist theologians:

In former times, the basic conception of the world was that it was created in the beginning and remained a static entity: God’s activity consisted primarily in maintaining what had already been established. Now that we realize that the world is becoming, that genuinely new things come into being by evolution and other processes, fresh ideas of divine presence and agency are needed.<sup>45</sup>

Our social network and social responsibility at the molecular level is Earth, human and nonhuman in a dance of co-creation. Understanding the ‘integrity of creation,’ in the words of indigenous theologian Tink Tinker, “will then most naturally include other individuals and communities of human beings. And justice and then peace will flow out of our concern for one another and all creation.”<sup>46</sup>

Through feminist analysis, women around the globe have effectively brought to light the various hegemonic practices of patriarchy in relation to

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<sup>45</sup>E. A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007, 187.

<sup>46</sup>Tinker, “The Integrity of Creation,” 536.

women.<sup>47</sup> Starting with feminist analysis, women wrote about the mind/body split, body alienation, dualism, social justice and how this was perpetuated in school classrooms, religious institutions, families, and the work place. Although much of this analysis took place in 'secular' institutions, the critiques were deeply prophetic. Women identified 'women's ways of knowing' based on a sense of connection and an ethic of care and then linking women's alienation with an overall cosmology.

Ecofeminist analysis, a later movement, has taken the realization of epistemological development to another level. Ecofeminist analysis is from the awareness that Cartesian cosmology<sup>48</sup> is the basis of the evils of patriarchy and our environmental issues.<sup>49</sup> They recognize that we have lost our somatic sense of 'whereness' and accordingly objectify our interactions, not considering them sacred. Sallie McFague calls for an 'attentional epistemology'<sup>50</sup> which will heal our perceptual dimension and

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<sup>47</sup>The critique within the feminist liberation field has rightly acknowledged that although the oppression of women was an international issue, the oppression was from particular contexts. The contextual background became the frame for various movements related to 'difference' based on embodied experience. Experience is the revolutionary character of feminist theorizing; e.g., *mujerista* (a Latina feminist perspective) and womanist (an African American perspective). The movement itself became self-critical and resulted in a greater consciousness when internationally, women of socio-economic "privilege" were made aware by their sisters of other socio-economic groups that issues of liberation were not universal.

<sup>48</sup>Ecofeminism transcends gender, for in many bioregions around Earth men also, no longer feel at home on earth. Responding to a draft of an article critiquing critical pedagogy, Albert Selvin wrote to colleague Elizabeth Ellsworth: "I too have to differentiate myself from a position defined for me – whose terms are imposed on me – which limits and can destroy me – which does destroy many White men or turns them into helpless agents...I as a White man/boy was not allowed – by my family, by society – to be anything but cut off from the earth and the body. That condition is not/was not an essential component or implication of my maleness." Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 59, 3, (1989), 323.

<sup>49</sup>Delores Williams does not address cosmology but links the oppression of black women's bodies and the rape of Earth with American national consciousness. Instead of addressing alienation Williams, a Womanist theologian, names the assault on the environment and black women's bodies as sins of 'defilement.' D. Williams, "Sin, Nature and Black Women's Bodies" in Carol Adams, ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, New York: Continuum, 1993, 24-29.

<sup>50</sup>We already have an 'attentional epistemology' but the concern is to redirect the attention back towards our bodies, Earth's body, and develop a particular somatic awareness, a process of decentring and recentring.



is a corrective to the Cartesian null curriculum. She writes: “listening, paying attention to another, the other, in itself, for itself. It is the opposite of means-ends thinking, thinking of anything, everything as useful, necessary, pleasurable to oneself, that is, assuming that everything that is not the self has only utilitarian value.”<sup>51</sup> Attentional epistemology corrects Cartesian null curriculum by shaping a self *not* fashioned for self-sufficiency, autonomy, or competition.

Maria Harris fosters awakening to an alternative epistemology by correctly readdressing attention back to the body. She lists “awakening” as the first step taken by women in the seven-step *Dance of the Spirit*. Experiencing the senses alive, Harris writes:

The Awakening of spirituality starts with this special form of sensual attentiveness, which all of us possess, to feeling, touching, seeing and hearing, as well as to movement, gesture and rhythm...We will wake up as women to the essential connection between body and spirit, and come to know that the way to spirituality, and therefore the way to God and to everyone and everything else is through the body...and in the connection, never in the separation, we will begin to cultivate a rich inner life.<sup>52</sup>

Although written by women and about women’s spirituality, the process of awakening and learning to live in the souls’ rhythm is beyond gender. The seven steps of the *Dance of the Spirit* identified by Harris are awakening, discovering, creating, dwelling, nourishing, traditioning and transforming. Steps of Spirit in a dance are in contrast to other metaphors for movement of the Spirit; e.g., ladder or descent, which evoke a linear progression of movement – and not the movement of Spirit embedded in matter itself. Awakening is not a onetime event, but a dance leading to transforming self, social structure –fuelled by creativity. The steps interestingly are also aligned with the six universal values identified previously in the wisdom of religion.

Indigenous ways of knowing around the globe reveal a people aware of the unity of creation whose cultural practices have supported the awareness and celebration of the integrity of creation for thousands of years. They pay attention to different somatic experiences, and foster different values. Their goal is not to progress but to survive as a group. Their group includes ‘all my relations’ the human and the nonhuman. Regarding personal or group discernment these relations are considered for the unborn of the next seven

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<sup>51</sup>McFague, *The Body of God*, 50.

<sup>52</sup>Harris, *Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women’s Spirituality*, New York: Bantam, 1989, 11.

generations. Jim Cheney summarizes their epistemology/cosmology and educational philosophy contrasting it with Cartesian coed.

Indian knowledge of the natural world is based on an epistemology of respect requiring attentive listening to, and reciprocal communication with, the earth and is woven together within ceremonial worlds designed to accommodate human culture within (and as) a wild world. This knowledge is, essentially, a comedic way of being in the natural world rather than a tragic separation and alienation from that world. Western<sup>53</sup> knowledge, on the other hand, is often designed to bend or assimilate wild systems to cultural order and purpose. It therefore employs epistemologies of domination and control of both the nonhuman world and other humans and human cultures. In this difference we find very different understandings of the relevance of natural environments to the production of knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

The problematic understanding of the development of 'knowledge' by Cartesian national departments of education to ensure competitiveness for the domination and control of the natural world identified in question two is highlighted in Cheney's statement. Remembering the ecofeminist call for an attentional epistemology to reinforce a sense of 'whereness' and respect for life, we can see how valuable the indigenous wisdom is for the fourfold conversation. Native American philosopher Anne Waters casts her spotlight on educational process, underlying values, and null curriculum:

Worldviews embed value judgments. Values arise from particular places and historical events/experiences in those places. Value judgments are markers informing subjects about which aspects of the observed are important, and which are unimportant. Value judgments are markers informing the subject which attributes are to be paid attention, and which are not; which attributes are to be recognized and which are not. Perhaps, and most important, they mark which attributes are acknowledged as being (having existence) in the world, and which are not (to be).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Jim Cheney uses the word 'Western' but I prefer the word Cartesian because the cosmology that he is critiquing is operative also in Earth's north south and east. It is the same cosmology of domination and control which is contributing to the demise of the tribals and lands in India and around Earth.

<sup>54</sup>J. Cheney, "Truth Knowledge and the Wild World," *Ethics and the Environment* 10, 2(2005), 20-21.

<sup>55</sup>Waters, *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, Walden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 162.

Indigenous coed pays attention to different somatic awareness, gives value to these differences, and gives them existence, including ‘where’ knowledge comes from, Earth. Tribal wisdom and mystical thought in the world’s religious traditions have consistently expressed the understanding that separation is an illusion. The basic framework for indigenous coed is an intimate and complex set of inner and outer place-oriented environmental relationships. Indigenous peoples know that the Earth is interconnected and fuelled by Divine agency. Tribal ways of knowing and values are in sharp contrast to life practices and values in Cartesian culture. We have a lot to learn from them, yet paradoxically it is the dream of Cartesian culture that is destroying them and their habitats in the name of development.<sup>56</sup>

## **6. Where Do We Go from Here?<sup>57</sup>**

Many of those that have awakened to the integrity of creation and experienced a conversion back to soil and Divine energy are involved in a two sided educational process. This process is a model of religious education developed by Gabriel Moran.<sup>58</sup> The overall goal is to awaken and heal Cartesian coed and create alternative life practices. The first side is to teach religion (understanding) and the second is to teach to be religious (life practice in a particular way).

The first side is accomplished by a critical cultural analysis and the conversation of the four wisdoms, (questions one, two and three of this article). The conversation facilitates the understanding of the integrity of creation. Fostering a sense of interconnection through the conversation of the wisdoms of science, religion, women and indigenous peoples is the first step in the awakening/recovery process.

The second side, the lifestyle, is determined by a very simple lesson for discernment offered by Thomas Berry: “All human institutions, professions, programmes and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing

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<sup>56</sup>The global history of indigenous peoples is becoming known as they themselves access positions of power in the dominant culture, publish their ways of knowing and find friends and allies who acknowledge their ways of living as lessons for sustainable living and advocate for their survival.

<sup>57</sup>The intention of the fourth question is to help participants identify for themselves ways to channel their ‘blessed unrest,’ taking a stand for creating an environmentally sustainable, socially just and spiritually fulfilling human presence with Earth. Taking a stand is different than taking a position as the latter is usually against something, while the former is for something.

<sup>58</sup>Moran, “Understanding Religion and Being Religious,” *Pace* 21(1991), 249-252.

human-Earth relationship.”<sup>59</sup> With this mission in mind, individuals are attempting to shift the visions of their institutions through fostering understanding and exemplary lifestyles. Others have come together in communities forming monasteries, ashrams and eco-literacy centres taking a stand for life in communion with other life forms, human and nonhuman.

‘Green Sisters’ is an emergent movement of vowed Roman Catholic women, and lay women from various faith traditions in the US and abroad who have re-envisioned religious life based on *metanoia*, faith in the integrity of creation, and laying the foundations for life in the Ecozoic age. Sarah McFarland Taylor researched the vision and life practices of various women and communities in the US in *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. She describes life in the Ecozoic age as ‘ecospiritual mimetics.’

There is a similar memetic quality to the evolving culture of green sisters, in which the spirituality and ways of life of ecologically minded sisters embody the earth’s own patterns of diversity, pluraculture, planting, conservation, renewal and growth...In many ways, green sisters’ mission to heal and restore the life systems of the planet parallels the split between spirit and matter in Western philosophical consciousness that sisters themselves already seem to have “healed” within their own consciousnesses.<sup>60</sup>

Those with a faith in the integrity of creation have attained a bio-psycho/social/spiritual planetary amalgamation. They are aligned with the dance of the spirit and the universal values and understand Earth as a living system, a.k.a. Gaia. Community living through a Gaian educational philosophy,<sup>61</sup> a Gaian coed, can be seen at Green Mountain Monastery in Vermont, US and Tarumitra, Patna India. Each community engages the four questions in order to foster understanding and other life practices.

Green Mountain Monastery in Vermont, USA was co-founded by Sr Gail Worcelo and Thomas Berry. The monastery and eco-literacy centre exist to carry on the great momentum of the Catholic tradition as it has evolved through its six major Moments of Grace (desert, community, mendicant, intellectual, activist, and cosmological) paying particular attention to this sixth moment, the cosmological/planetary. Sr Gail and her

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<sup>59</sup>Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, New York: Maryknoll, 2009, 117.

<sup>60</sup>Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, 21.

<sup>61</sup>I prefer *Gaian* cosmology in contrast to the prevailing Cartesian cosmology for the awakened and healed faith in the integrity of creation.

colleagues want to move beyond the boundaries of separation and ego and lay the foundations for the Ecozoic Era, a single sacred community of Earth. The monastery is a learning site of bioregional living in preparation for the Ecozoic Era. These people, filled by grace have learned to transcend the previous five moments of Grace of the tradition and now embrace the ‘cosmological’ phase. This movement of Grace transcends the others and includes them at the same time. Green Mountain monastery has developed an exchange programme for women from Asia to come for a period of time to work study and pray the New Story.

Tarumitra is another example of an ecoliteracy centre embracing the two sided model of religious education.<sup>62</sup> The founder and director of Tarumitra, Dr Robert Athickal, clarifies ashram living from an evolutionary, ecological perspective.

Tarumitra is an ashram, since ashram is a polyvalent word. Gandhiji understood ashram differently from the traditional ashrams around enlightened Guru’s. At Tarumitra we try to live the life of the future in some way, reminding visitors that there is a need to think of what we would become one day, a universal and organically connected family. Why don’t we then start living it today, itself? That is the attempt in Tarumitra. Live that life of the future in some way at the same time mobilize resources and persons to create that beautiful possibility today. A lot of it is a life of faith.<sup>63</sup>

Fr Robert’s reflections, like the intentions of Sr Gail’s community, are witnessing a faith in the integrity of creation.<sup>64</sup> Each conveys the ecospiritual memetics identified by Taylor. While Tarumitra is an ashram devoted to living sustainably in consideration of the unborn of the next seventh generation, it is also a student movement far beyond its walls in Patna. Fr Robert has inspired youth in thousands of Indian schools after the Universe Story and recognising their kin-ship with all Earth creatures. Students have been involved in protests, save energy campaigns, tree plantations, rainwater harvesting, etc. They even reached the halls of the United Nations when 13 year old Yougratna Srivastav addressed the joint UN commission just prior to the Copenhagen summit. She asked the gathered assembly what they were

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<sup>62</sup>[www.tarumitra.org](http://www.tarumitra.org)

<sup>63</sup>From personal email 15 May 2012.

<sup>64</sup>Fr Jose Kallekel, an activist supporting the Kerala fishing community, has recently opened a Centre for Creation Spirituality in Anthamon, Kollam District, Kerala.

going to do for her generation and the generations to follow. Judging by the summit results, not many heard her plea.<sup>65</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The radical conversion of perspective from Cartesian cosmology to a cosmology from an ecological perspective – a Gaian cosmology and faith in the integrity of creation, is achieved in a two sided process of religious education and engagement with four questions.

The first side of the process is “understanding.” Uncovering and understanding our dysfunctional cosmology, is achieved in the first two questions. Through curriculum analysis of *coed*, it is possible to deconstruct and reconstruct cosmologies, values and contrasting life practices. In the third question, the critical conversation of the fourfold wisdom, religion, women, tribals and science evokes other values and reshapes human desires. The engagement fosters a cosmology from an ecological perspective called for by the Earth Charter and UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development identified in Question One.

The second side of the process is the lifestyle flowing out of this awakened and healed Gaian cosmology. The fourth question shows the effects of Gaian cosmology, an ecological perspective that is “compatible with sustainable use of natural resources,...a sense of global solidarity...to help people better understand the world in which they live.”<sup>66</sup>

To effectively reshape the design of our world view and evoke values in action that will offer correctives for our environment, social and spiritual concerns we first need to heal ourselves. By healing ourselves we can point the way to our colleagues, a public spiritual direction in understanding and life practice.

Poet Denise Levertov assures us saying:

Holiness does not dissolve, it is a presence

Of Bronze, only the sight that saw it faltered and turned from it.

An old joy returns in holy presence.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Her speech can be viewed on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

<sup>66</sup>“ESD in Brief,” <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images>, 12 May 2012.

<sup>67</sup>D. Levertov, *Selected Poems*, New York: New Directions Publishing, 2002, 178.