Twelve Understandings Concerning the Ecozoic Era (a CES Foundational Statement)

The Nature of the Universe

1. The Unity of the Universe. The universe as a whole is an interacting community of beings inseparably related in space and time. From its beginning the universe has had a psychic-spiritual dimension. The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.

2. Modes of Expression. The universe expresses itself at all levels through communion (intimacy, interrelatedness), differentiation (diversity), and subjectivity (interiority, self-organization).

3. Cosmogenesis. The universe is a creative, emergent, evolutionary reality that has developed and is still developing through a sequence of irreversible transformations.
4. **Earth.** Earth is a one-time endowment in the unfolding story of the universe.

5. **The Current Dilemma.** The effects of human activity on Earth have become so pervasive and invasive that the survival and health of the Earth community now rest on decisions being made, and actions being taken, by humans.

6. **Transition to the Ecozoic Era.** There is a need to move from the current technozoic period where Earth is seen as resource for the benefit of humans, to an Ecozoic Era where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern.

   **Three Key Building Blocks**

7. **The New Story.** The New Story, the new scientific narrative of the evolutionary development of the universe from its primordial beginnings to the Anthropocene (physical cosmology), gives rise to new cosmologies (religious and philosophical) of the universe and the role of humans in the universe process.

8. **Bioregionalism.** Bioregionalism, care for Earth in its relatively self-sustaining geo-biological divisions, reorients human activity in developing sustainable modes of living, building inclusive human community, caring for the rights of other species, and preserving the health of the Earth on which all life depends.

9. **Ecological Spirituality.** Ecological Spirituality, presence to the primal mystery and value of nature and to Earth as a single sacred community, provides a basis for revitalizing religious experience and healing the human psyche.

10. **Women, Indigenous People, Science, and Humanistic and Religious Traditions.** The wisdoms of women, indigenous people, science, and classical humanistic and religious traditions will have important roles to play in redefining concepts of value, meaning and fulfillment, and in setting norms of conduct for the Ecozoic Era.

11. **The Earth Charter.** The Earth Charter provides a comprehensive set of values and principles for the realization of the Ecozoic Era.*

12. **The Great Work.** The epic task, or “Great Work,” of our time is to bring into being the Ecozoic Era. It is a task in which everyone is involved and from which no one is exempt, and it will require change in every aspect of human society. On it the fate of the Earth depends, and in it lies the hope of the future.

* The Earth Charter may be viewed at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org).
Resilient Sustainability
By Mike Bell

In 1972, the book *Limits to Growth*\(^1\) was published. It was the result of a research project commissioned by the Club of Rome and developed by a team of scientists, many of them from MIT. The prime author was Donella Meadows, and her husband, Dennis Meadows, was the Project Director.

As suggested in the title, the book, applying extensive data and using computer modelling, showed how ecological constraints could affect human development in the 21\(^{st}\) century based on different scenarios. The authors understood that Earth was a one-time endowment. They presented the limits in its ability to bounce back from the damage that would result in the scenarios that were not sustainable. While virtually never covered in the press, the book offered four (out of 12) scenarios where policies of sustainable development, if applied at that time, would have resulted in equilibrium states consistent with Earth’s limits.

In March 2012, forty years after the book’s publication, Dennis Meadows gave a talk at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., entitled, “*Limits to Growth and the End of Sustainability.*” His talk is available for viewing at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2oyU0RusiA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2oyU0RusiA), and the PowerPoint he presented may be accessed at [http://www.si.edu/consortia/limitstogrowth2012](http://www.si.edu/consortia/limitstogrowth2012). He said that, given the path that had been taken since 1972, sustainable development was no longer possible and we are entering a period of uncontrolled decline. Building resilience as we go through this period is now our best hope. In other words we need to take steps now that help people and Earth adapt to the new situations they are beginning to experience and offer the basis for long-term recovery.

“Resilience” is the key to the work of Bud Hollings and Lance Gunderson. In their book, *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems*,\(^2\) they describe resilience as the ability of systems to adapt to changing environments and, in some situations, recover. They begin with the resilience of natural systems and point out the same transformative capacities in human systems.

Over the past 30 years in my work with Inuit and Dene people in the Arctic, I have experienced the merging of sustainability with resilience in a cultural context. Both of these


cultures emerged through the experience of their elders and ancestors as hunter-gatherers living on the land.

In the middle of the last century, for a variety of reasons, they were forced to move off the land into settlements controlled by governments, the Hudson Bay Company and the churches. There they experienced difficulties with addictions, the ravages of the residential schools, family break-ups, and the attacks on their culture and way of life. For many individuals and families, the transition from life on the land to life in settlements was very difficult. One First Nation person with whom I work refers to this period as “the time of darkness.” In spite of it all, they have managed to preserve their cultures.

The foundation of their cultures—their sustainability—has been the transmission of values based upon their relationship to their land. These values have been interpreted and passed on by their traditional elders.

These elders, however, know very little about the application of these values to the modern life of schools, agencies, economic systems and new forms of governance. So we have seen the emergence of “young elders,” many of whom lived on the land as children. As they grew up, they came through “the times of darkness.” They received educations, worked for modern companies and governments, and became aware of the challenges facing their families and communities.

These young elders committed to the values of their traditional elders and ancestors. They see these values—such as “respect for the land”—as universal, spiritual principles that transcend time and are even more relevant today than in the past. They seek guidance from the remaining old elders as they struggle to help their families and communities interpret and adapt the traditional cultural values to a modern society. Their old ways have become a living culture giving them resilience to carry on.

As I listened to Meadows talk about resilient sustainability and thought of the work of Hollings and Gunderson, I could hear echoes in my mind—the voices of traditional elders in so many community meetings repeating over and over their mantra: “Learn from the land.”

The Supreme Court and Equal Rights for Gay Couples
By Del Morrill

The United States Supreme Court in the current session will address whether to uphold the part of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that prohibits same-sex, legally-married-under-state-law couples from obtaining federal benefits. Personally, I can’t see how that law, which, to me, seems to unconstitutional, can remain standing!

How can partners be so discriminated against just because they were born a certain way, and want to legalize their unions? Why should they be denied the rights that other
partners assume are theirs? Why shouldn’t they be able to visit their loved ones in hospitals and other situations as members of the family? And why shouldn’t they get the same benefits that are due to other couples?

Times have so changed since homosexuals were put in prison for being who they are, actions often justified by interpretations of scriptures and certainty that those who were punished had sinned. Still, I can understand the struggle it must be for scripture followers, Christian, Muslim and others, in trying to reconcile their faith with what is changing in our world today. It must be much more difficult for “believers” than non-believers to change with the times. For those who understand scriptures as being literally true (often being unaware of their own scriptural selectivity) change must threaten their very belief systems.

People must learn to separate their emotions from their understanding of the underpinnings of American philosophy and law. Our constitution calls for “equal rights for all.” It is appalling that women, people of color and homosexuals must fight for years for those rights that our founders declared to be “FOR ALL.” Rights (local and federal) for gay people is a legal question, not one of religion, faith or philosophy. You can live your faith without condemning those whose conduct does not agree with your faith.

I admit to my own discomfort in watching two men kiss. (This is harder for me than watching two women do so, because we have been more accustomed to kissing each other as mere friends). But this doesn’t give me the right to deny equality to such pairings due to my own discomfort. When I lived In Japan, I observed it was not at all unusual to see men holding hands while walking down the street. Ironically, in Japan, a man and woman doing the same was definitely improper as late as the mid-1970s when I last lived there. Yet here in our own country, to see men holding hands seems strange and discomfiting. But is that justification for denying the same rights that other citizens have?

Aren’t we strange human beings when it comes to any kind of affection, sexuality or relationships? A pat on the bottom is okay on the football field, but not in other public situations. A big hug in baseball with your teammates is okay in the game, but not on the streets. A fat man with huge breasts can walk down the street without a shirt, but a thin woman without breasts would be thrown in jail as indecent if she removed her blouse. A kiss is okay when greeting a friend. It might make others feel uncomfortable, but it doesn’t cause the same reactions as two men doing the same simple, human thing. We are, indeed, strange creatures.

And strangest of all, to me, is that of making all of this a “religious” issue. People try to force their beliefs on the rest of the world. I sometimes wonder if these same people secretly long for the separation of the races and for women to stay in their places. How many of those who oppose gay rights fought for the civil rights of women or people of color? (Let’s see, what color am I really – ivory-beige-pink-tan in the summer?) Once again, we are dealing with civil rights – it’s just a case of a different group of people who have had to struggle with bigotry.
In the case presented to the Supreme Court, we also have this confused concern for States’ rights. Some seek to deny “States’ rights” by upholding DOMA, a federal law. Others seek to resolve the present controversy by leaving to the States who can be married. Though a good outcome for same-sex couples in nine states, those who want those rights and benefits in the other 41 would be denied equal rights FOR ALL. I doubt we would have succeeded with basic civil rights for African-Americans and others of color, if we had just allowed the States to have their own rights to do what they wanted to keep doing. At that time in our history, I don’t recall any of the States voting to change the discriminatory laws that were challenged.

As to the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, human beings have certain basics across the globe, and one of them is biology! I know this is a difficult matter for many. We all have various issues that trigger wild swings in our hearts and minds. I feel that on this issue, but now I’m ready to move on. I hope you will join me, and I pray for a decision by the Supreme Court that overturns DOMA based on equal rights FOR ALL!

**The Chronicle**

*Our readers are invited to present their own reports of what they are paying attention to in the transition from economic-industrial ecological-cultural societies.*

**Herman Greene – Are We Entering a Period of Uncontrolled Decline?**

Thomas Berry would often speak from the template of where are we, how did we get here, where are we going? These questions were not his invention, but I find them, as he did, to be extremely useful.

The order is important. One’s view of the future is shaped, even largely determined by, one’s assessment of where we are and how we got here. This is the reason why, in rhetoric, before a speaker states what is needed, he or she will begin with the present as a condition or problem and then give a history before stating what needs to be done.

It all starts with one’s understanding of where we are. In the talk by Dennis Meadows referenced in Mike Bell’s article in this issue, Meadows states that in 1972, when *Limits to Growth* was first published, four of 12 scenarios they modelled showed that things could be brought to a suitable equilibrium before humanity breached sustainable limits. Now he says it is too late.
He validates this by this graph from the Global Footprint network:

![Graph showing ecological footprint growth]

It shows that in 1972, the ecological footprint of humanity was 85% of global carrying capacity, whereas now it is 150% of carrying capacity. So if humans collectively are living at an unsustainable rate of consumption, then it cannot be sustained, much less continue to grow (though some short-term growth is still possible, just as it is possible continually to increase catches of fish in an area right up to the time when fish stocks collapse). He believes we are entering a time of uncontrollable decline. We have lived in a bubble economy, he says, and he compares this uncontrollable decline to what happens in a stock market when a bubble bursts: A fall begins that cannot be stopped in the short run and where it will end no one knows. It ends when a new, lower equilibrium state is reached.

What needs to be done during the fall is not all that different from what should have been done to avoid the fall, but it is more difficult. This is especially true regarding environmental concerns, because society has tended primarily to allocate resources to sustainable solutions as add-ons from excess earnings during periods of high growth. Allocating such resources in decline will both be more difficult and more important. In such a situation, following Meadows’ teaching, we now need to find our justification in “resilience,” rather than in “development.”

In his talk, Meadows reflects on why the warning of Limits to Growth, and others like it, including the climate warnings, have not been heeded. He has found that “public discourse has
difficulty with subtle, conditional messages.” (The book had 12 scenarios and many conditions.) And further he has found that people tend not to shift paradigms, but rather find new justifications for their existing paradigms. He offered this quote from The Folly of Fools; The Logic of Deceit and Self-Deception in Human Life by Robert Trivers, as explanatory of why this is so:

> At every single stage – from its biased arrival to its biased encoding, to organizing it around false logic, to misremembering and then misrepresenting it to others, the mind continually acts to distort information flow in favor of the usual good goal of appearing better than one really is. (P. 139)

Another key learning for him is that “we act as if technological change can substitute for social change.”

That we are already in a period of uncontrolled decline is a new notion. The idea generally held, even by environmentalists, is that there is still time to avoid this condition.


I return again and again to this list of areas where transformational leadership is needed that I found in David Orr’s Down to the Wire and D. Paul Schafer’s Revolution or Renaissance:

(i) creating a new theoretical, practical, historical and philosophical framework for the world of the future (with an emphasis on the cultural dimension of life);
(ii) dealing with the intimate relationship between people and the natural environment,
(iii) providing uncommon clarity about our best economic and energy options,
(iv) helping people understand and face what will be increasingly difficult circumstances, and
(v) fostering a vision of a humane and decent future.

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