

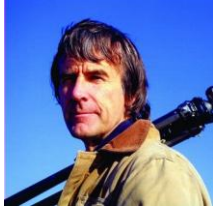




Memories of Marlborough

Conference 2008 Newsletter Supplement

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Lloyd Geering | Carolyn King | Craig Potton | Juliet Batten | Derek McCullough |

Excerpts from the Plenary Addresses

The full presentations are to be found on the website

Communing with Gaia by Juliet Batten

Communing begins with listening. When we learn to listen to nature through contemplation and meditation, we may be surprised at what we pick up and what messages we receive.

For many years now I have been listening to the seasons. ... And what did I hear? How imperative it is that we foster our connection with the natural world. Gaia grieves that we attend so little to her. Not only must we attend to Gaia for her sake, but we must also do so for our own. The human soul must have an intimate connection with nature in order to develop its full potential. We must learn to commune with Gaia.

What else did I discover when listening to nature? I learned about the rhythm of the yearly cycle and the relationship between outer and inner seasons. The more I paid attention to the seasons, over the last 22 years celebrating eight festivals each year with a group of women, the more I became aware of the significance of coming into alignment with the great wheel of life. Here are five action points for you to take away with you and consider:

1. Build awareness by gardening, keeping a seasonal log, or enacting rituals to mark the transition points between seasons.
2. Praise: through poems, paintings, photography, song or dance to celebrate the movement of life.
3. Sit and commune with Gaia. Create an altar and on it place symbols which are renewed through the seasons. Foster this relationship.
4. Make sure that your children and grandchildren develop an intimate relationship with wild nature.
5. Do something for the earth in every season.

By communing with Gaia we open our senses, minds, hearts and souls to nature. We listen and speak, soul to soul, becoming so attuned to the living power of this planet, the life force, Gaia, God, divine energy or whatever we call it, that we tend to all living things as if they were part of our own body. Then we can no more pollute and poison the earth, water or air than we could pollute or poison our own selves.

Then we become kaitiaki, guardians and protectors of Gaia, the soul of nature, and in doing so, kaitiaki of our own souls as well.

In Sync with the Sine Wave by Derek McCullough

... we should celebrate our religious calendar in conjunction with our own seasons and not with the seasons of the northern hemisphere from whence they came.

... pondering one of the big theological questions, perhaps the biggest after "Who am I?", namely "where am I?" There are two ways of finding that out.

The modern way is just to take out the GPS locator and switch it on and you can find your so many degrees west, so many degrees south. But the other method, the method that has been used by the ancients and which is far more appropriate, is the idea of paying attention: of looking at nature and working out by the track of the sun in the sky and things around as to where you are and then from that point you can start to work on aligning ritual to where you are which directly relates to where we are in the southern hemisphere.

I think the sine wave is a wonderful representation of balance at work, and it has been suggested that you can define the spirit is the part of the sine wave when we were above the centre line and the soul is below the centre line. So the spirit is what we look up to in the sky and therefore outside of ourselves and the soul is the introspective part, the internal part looking internally the contemplative part.

By changing our rituals to our own seasons so that New Year is where it should be in the depths of the winter, we uncouple that aspect of ritual from material consumerism and I think that there is some benefit in that in terms of trying to separate the spiritual from the secular in our celebrations

God, Gaia and Us

Moving Towards a New Form of Mysticism: A Keynote Address by Emeritus Professor Lloyd Geering

These are excerpts: the full paper is on the website.

Everything in the universe is connected.

The Latin word from which we derive 'universe' simply means 'turned into one' and what turns 'all that is' into a **universe** is connectedness. Of course what the ancient Romans understood as the universe has turned out to be only a small part of what we understand as the universe. But even though we now believe the universe to contain galaxies far distant in space from our own galaxy, they are still connected and can all be traced back to a common origin that we currently call the 'Big Bang'.

The phenomenon of connectedness, however, is particularly applicable to our planetary home, that we call Earth. All life on this planet has its own form of connectedness. And we humans are part of it. We are just as much creatures of the earth as are the wild animals and the insects. We have our roots in the earth, metaphorically, just as much as plants and trees. We humans are made of the dust of the earth and to dust we return, as the Bible has long affirmed.

... I am going to suggest ... that in some rather curious ways the ancients may have had a healthier understanding of the universe than we do today, in spite of the highly sophisticated and technological culture of the West.

1. The emergence of the It-world.

Whereas everything was once thought to be permeated by a life-force, a concept still preserved in certain Maori terms, it came to be recognised during the Great Transformation [Karen Armstrong's term for what others refer to as "the Axial Age"] that not everything in the world is alive or has ever been alive. Not only are rocks and mountains **not** alive but **neither** are volcanoes, rivers, clouds and storms, however much movement and vitality they appear to show. The emergence of the It-world was a great breakthrough in human perception. In the long run it was destined to lead to the emergence of the physical sciences, especially physics, chemistry.

2. The transition from polytheism to monotheism.

Over a period of several hundred years the belief in many gods was replaced by the belief in only one God. While we may speculate, with a variety of theories, as to why the transition from polytheism to monotheism took place, the fact remains that it did. The Bible was mostly written during and after that transition and thus it documents the process very clearly. There we find a battle being waged between the prophets who pioneered the emergence of monotheism, and the defenders of polytheism who tried desperately to preserve the Canaanite worship of the forces of nature.

3. The supremacy of the Sky God.

As polytheism slowly evolved into monotheism, many of the features of the former Sky God were retained and transferred to the (now) one and only deity.

4. Immanence of the divine gave way to transcendence.

Humans were no longer living among the gods but in an earthly world far below the heavenly world in which God lived. The physical tangible world eventually became degraded, as we shall now see with ...

5. The Emergence of the dualistic universe.

The overall unity of 'all that is' became strained, with the result that the one-world universe of the ancients became a two-world universe. After the Great Transformation the whole of reality was believed to consist of an unseen upper world (eternal and spiritual) and this seen lower world (materialistic, time-bound, and lacking spirituality). The seen world became a 'fallen world', wholly at the mercy of the spiritual world and destined for final destruction.

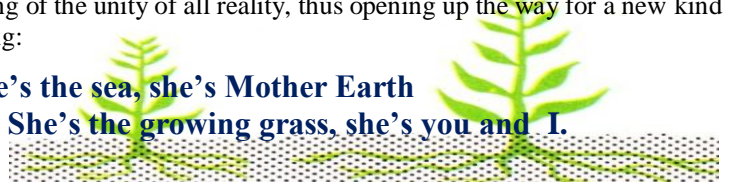
... So by the beginning of the 21st century, this is the picture of the real world we are becoming adjusted to. But is this all that is? Not by a very long way. During the last four hundred years, as the dualistic world imagined by Christian consciousness was slowly dissolving, another and much vaster picture of the universe has been replacing it from the time of Galileo onwards. We entered the 20th century with astronomers talking about an expanding universe. It is quite literally expanding even though it is now so enormous that our minds can no longer contain it, in the way our forbears, ... thought they could.

The **Gaia theory** proposes that the biosphere is connected with the other physical components of the Earth – the atmosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere – in such a way as to form a complex interacting system. This system acts in a homeostatic fashion that preserves climatic and biochemical conditions on Earth to make it suitable for living systems.

Gaia theory does not say the earth **is** a living organism but rather that life in all of its diversity has so evolved in relation to the physical forces of its earthly environment that it operates rather **like** an organism, worthy of the name **Gaia**. The living envelope of the earth, along with its environmental home, constitutes a self-regulating system similar to the immunity systems in the human body. As the human body has a remarkable capacity to restore itself to health or wholeness, so the natural forces of the earth have a remarkable capacity to preserve and restore the climatic and biogeochemical conditions on Earth that make it suitable for living systems.

This fresh awareness of our connectedness is giving rise to a new manifestation of mysticism. The mystic is the one who seeks by self-surrender to be united, even absorbed within, the ultimate reality. ... In the modern form of human consciousness that traditional dualism has been superseded by a new understanding of the unity of all reality, thus opening up the way for a new kind of mysticism. ... To celebrate this we may join in the Gaia song:

**Gaia is the one who gives birth / She's the air, she's the sea, she's Mother Earth
She's the creatures that crawl and swim and fly/ She's the growing grass, she's you and I.**



In Tomorrow's Coliseum: Gaia or the Lions?

A Keynote Address by Dr. Carolyn King

These are excerpts: the full set of slides will be available on the website early in the new year.

Forms of the Gaia hypothesis

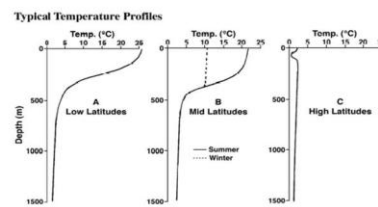
(all in Lovelock's own words: Russell 1994)

- 1. **Weak form** (relatively uncontroversial)
 - "a complex entity involving Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil"
 - Accepted as a "working model" by Amsterdam Declaration 2001
 - >1000 delegates representing 4 principal climate-change research units
 - But agreement excluded concept of a "goal"
- 2. **Strong form** (contested by many scientists)
 - "the Gaia hypothesis supposes the Earth to be alive"
 - Problem is agreeing on definition of "alive"
- 3. **Extreme form** (rejected by many scientists)
 - Life on earth "actively regulates the global environment so as to maintain conditions comfortable for life"
 - Implication of purpose inescapable

15

Gaian basics 1. Temperature sets limits to life in the sea

- When sea surface temp $>10^{\circ}\text{C}$, forms a stable upper layer
 - nutrients fall out as pelagic organisms die and sink, but stable surface "lid" prevents turnover bringing them back to surface
 - True of 80% world's oceans now, hence clear, blue, relatively lifeless
- Only Arctic/Antarctic water $<10^{\circ}\text{C}$ throughout
 - Nutrients well mixed, water cloudy, supporting abundant marine life
 - Krill, whales, penguins
 - "Gaia likes it cold" - Lovelock



earthguide.ucsd.edu

17

Gaian basics 2.

Temperature sets limits to life on land

- Below 10°C , plant growth inhibited
- Above 25°C , all free water lost unless constantly renewed by rain, or held in permanent vegetation
 - Tropical forest makes its own rain
 - But that system would be disabled by a rise of 4°C
 - Followed by mass extinctions

Consequences of mass extinctions

- In **Gaia models, critical mass of biota for maintenance effect requires 70-80% earth surface occupied by life**
 - Abundant life stores excess carbon, as in Carboniferous times (stored as coal)
 - Without it, trend to chemical equilibrium too strong
- **Reduction of biota to one thousandth of present would be fatal for most species**
 - CO_2 could not be prevented from rising
 - O_2 would escape
 - temperature would rise above tolerable levels



Carboniferous forests

universe-review.ca

21

Gaia: from process to person

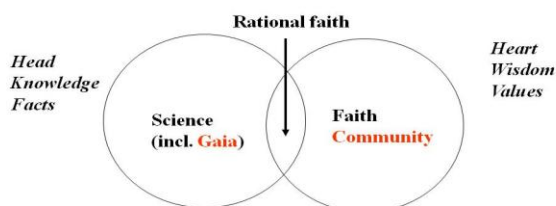
- Personal metaphor implies that Gaia is a *living* metaphysical being
- **So what is life? Depends whose definition you use** - Lovelock quotes three:
 1. **Physicist**: Organism with capacity for self-organisation including ability to reduce internal entropy
 2. **Biochemist**: Organism capable of using energy to grow according to inherited genetic instructions
 3. **Biologist**: Organism capable of reproduction and of evolution by natural selection among variable offspring

39

So what happens if Gaia becomes a political statement?

- **Harmless forms**
 - used like "Mother earth" - a term with emotive value
 - connection with Mother Earth symbolism strongly appeals to post-Christian age interested in pantheism
 - in green politics, especially when linked with ecofeminist theology
 - in advocacy for a different attitude to environmental management
 - Sustainable development ("impossible - what we need is sustainable retreat" - JL)
 - in commercial advertising ("save money and mother earth")
- **Dangerous forms**
 - Open to manipulation/political takeover for disguised sectarian or private interests, with no contrary argument
 - Carbon trading, false advertising of "Gaia-friendly" products
 - Coercion/ forced obedience in the name of tribal/human survival

The world needs people with rational, compassionate faith, inspired by love, not fear



- We need faith in the invisible realities behind both science and myth,
- And a community-level response
- Gaia can help, but is not enough alone

52

We need to be ready



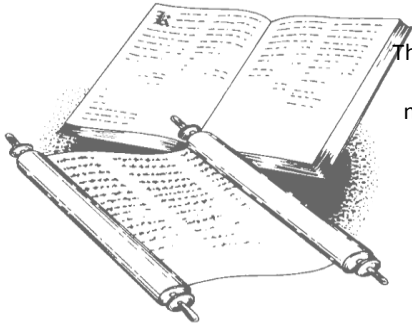
- **Local communities will be needed if the worst happens (or if it doesn't)**
 - Sense of belonging has helped people through previous disasters
 - Fall of Rome, Black Death, London Blitz
 - Love and faith have a deep understanding of humanity based on support, values outside this world
- **Global climate could "flip" suddenly during periods of environmental stress**
 - Temperature increased 5°C in a few years, 14,500 yr ago
 - We may not be able to prevent it
- **Therefore, build local communities well in advance - be ready!**

Prophetic and Mystic Voices

A Keynote Address by Craig Potton

These are excerpts: the full paper is on the website.

It was the voice of Hebrew prophets that first attempted to tear the people from their altars and send them out into the world.



I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.
Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings,
I will not accept them:
neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

(Amos 5.21-4)

For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice;
and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings

(Hosea 6.6)

The Jewish faith stresses it is the deed, not the intention or the motive that really counts. Rabbi Akiva said, "All depends on the preponderance of good deeds." It is the weight of good deeds that bears down on the balance scale.

The Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer took this notion one step further by asserting that success is not ethically neutral. He, a pacifist priest who was involved in a plot to kill Hitler, recognised that there are times one must simply go for it and go for it hard, without too many scruples, to achieve a favourable outcome, because our history is the record of what happened, not what didn't happen. As in Bonhoeffer's extreme situation, and each day in a lesser way too, the imperative is to act and do good and thus combat evil.

Rabbi Herschel said "evil explains everything and settles nothing". It's our spiritual duty to settle things - we may realise on the way that we will make mistakes, but the fear of mistakes is no reason not to go on acting to the best of our conscience. Each action, freely made, will create a new situation so there is no predetermined destiny to our lives, or the planet's survival. It is in our hands. Rumi puts it thus: "Trust that God has intelligence enough to use you appropriately." He also said, "Cautious people say 'I'll do nothing until I can be sure.' Merchants know better. If you do nothing you lose.... you must set fire."

The Jews have always recognised the imperfection of man; David made a wonderful kingdom despite his appalling lust for Bathsheba and his consequent unforgivable treatment of Uriah. In Hasidic faith there is the gem of a thought that we all have a number of small things in life that we should do, and that only we can do, and though in themselves they will not change the world, we still have to do them, as collectively they will help.

Andre Gide observed in 1940 in his journal, "When a certain stage of history is reached, everything appears in the guise of a problem, and people's responsibility increases as that of the Gods decreases. It devolves upon people alone in the final reckoning, to solve all these problems which he alone has presumably raised." It is we humans who are destroying nature; it is we humans who must save it.

Now I come to the question of this conference: Is Gaia the new God?

It's hard to get a clear retrospective view on the teachings, rituals, and power bases that emphasised the Earth Mother in the pre-Axial religious period. We bring to that perspective, feminist, literary, psychological and New Age idealisms that are mostly anachronisms, dreamed up in the heat of optimism for a golden age which is often seen as the historic and social equivalent to the joy of childhood. The only problem is that just like childhood, it most certainly was not all joy and light. We do now know quite clearly from the work of palaeontologists such as Tim Flannery (The Future Eaters) that with minimal technology humans wrecked whole ecosystems (the forests of Saharan Africa and Lebanon for extinction -- at the very time when the Mediterranean cultus centered around an Earth Mother.

It is now clear that obeisance to her may have helped the crops grow and a pregnancy succeed, but all the reverence, sacrifice and ritual for the Mother, all the shamanism, totemism and mystical stories of animal ancestral paths did nothing to stop a wholesale slaughter of other creatures and the destruction of large areas of forest. If the Gaia theory was intended to offer any hope from, or nostalgia for, historic or prehistoric models of a closer, more tender, connection to nature, that hype and hope is forlorn.

... if the word Gaia is to carry the new meaning attributed largely to James Lovelock's notion of the earth as a self-regulating super organism that, despite our abuse of it, may still right itself because it is much more resilient than contemporary scientists and middle-class doomsayers predict, then I would say it is a fool who sits in his or her own sewerage waiting for a superpower intervention.

We have already reached that grand metaphoric moment William Burroughs called "the naked lunch" when everyone sees - or is about to see - what is on the end of their fork.

And it's not always pleasant.