

# Sacred Earth, a New Economy, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century University

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April 4, 2013,  
CIRS Main Lecture Hall 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

I'm thrilled to be a part of this student initiated, student led gathering and of the larger movement you are spearheading. I had all but given up hope that our universities might become relevant to the extreme challenges humanity faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I had not considered the possibility that students might provide the leadership needed to drive the transformation of higher education.

It makes perfect sense. No one is more aware of the failure of our institutions of higher learning than you, their students, are. They send you out into a failing 21<sup>st</sup> century world with a 20<sup>th</sup> century education that prepares to serve corrupted institutions we must now put behind us burdened with student debts that may keep you in bondage to the old system for the rest of your lives. You have good reason to rebel.

You are society's canaries in the mineshaft and you are organizing to sound the alarm and demand change. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You offer hope for the human future.

## Institutional Failure

To get us all on the same page, let me begin with a quick overview of state of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. You might think of it as a list of issues our universities are failing to address.

1. We face a global **economic crisis** created by an unstable financial system that favors speculation over real investment, drives continuing cycles of boom and bust, mires people and governments in debts they cannot pay, and holds national governments hostage to the interests of global financiers.
2. We face a global **social crisis** of extreme and growing inequality. The enormous disparities feed violence by undermining institutional legitimacy, human health, and the social fabric of families and communities.
3. We face a global **environmental crisis** of climate chaos, loss of fertile soil, shortages of clean freshwater, disappearing forests, and collapsing fisheries. This crisis is reducing Earth's capacity to support life and creating large-scale human displacement and hardship that further fuel social breakdown.

4. We face a **governance crisis** in the seeming incapacity of any of our major institutions, including universities, to come to terms with and address the three aforementioned economic, social, and environmental crises.

These four crises are interlinked, self-imposed, potentially terminal, and a direct consequence of institutional structures that value money more than life and that allocate power to those least likely to use it in service to the common good. We the people, allow this travesty to play out because we live in a cultural trance induced by stories that lead us to accept beliefs and values at odds with reality—a condition for which our academic and media institutions bear a major responsibility.

Your student movement is part of a larger human awakening to the foundational reality that we humans are living beings that survive and thrive only as members of a Sacred Earth community of life. Life and Earth are sacred—meaning they are entitled to reverence and respect. Money is just a number.

We must build from the bottom up the institutions of a new system that aligns with this reality. If that sounds like a serious challenge, you hear correctly.

We will not get out of our current mess by tinkering at the margins of a failed system to make it slightly less destructive.

## A Personal Wakeup Call

I devoted some thirty years of my professional life to international development, including twenty-one years living and working in Africa, Latin America, and Asia on a mission to end world poverty. I originally assumed that the work of international development was to support the people of impoverished countries in learning to use their talents and natural wealth more efficiently and effectively to meet their needs and achieve healthy happy lives. Over time, I realized that what was really happening was very different.

Yes, I witnessed growth in GDP, expansion of the middle class, and the accumulation of huge fortunes by a fortunate few.

I also, however, observed that as GDP grew, life for the majority became less secure and more desperate. Slums spread. Families and communities disintegrated. Once beautiful cultures, survived mainly as tourist attractions. Rivers died. Once vibrant coastal corals and verdant hillsides became barren wastelands.

Eventually, I realized that in the name of helping the poor, rich countries were loaning poor countries foreign currency to invest in growing their economies. Because foreign currency is only good for buying things from abroad, this created dependence on foreign goods and technology purchased with loans that could be repaid only by selling their national labor and assets to foreigners.

When payment came due, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank stepped in like mafia debt collectors with baseball bats ready to break legs. They told indebted countries they must restructure their economies, not to better meet the needs of their own people, but rather to repay the debt. Reduce your spending on health and education, they

said. Sell your land and natural resources to private foreign corporations. Set up duty free zones with cheap nonunionized labor with no rights or benefits to produce goods for export to foreign consumers.

Debt, dependence, and deprivation for the many. Outsized profits for the few.

You may recognize a familiar pattern, something of a preview of the dynamic that now plays out in varied forms here in Canada, the United States, in Europe, and all around the world.

## In Search of the Sacred

Why do we tolerate it? We humans crave meaning and purpose. This leads us to place great stock in shared cultural stories that lend purpose, meaning and direction to our lives and relationships. Political demagogues have long recognized that those who control these stories control the society. During the 20th century, corporate PR and advertising specialists became masters of the arts of cultural manipulation to create an individualistic culture of profligate material consumption that serves well the short-term interests of the financial oligarchy, but now threatens the survival of all.

Of our many influential cultural stories, the most important are those that define what we hold to be sacred [entitled to reverence or respect]. When we get the sacred wrong, we entangle ourselves in a collective web of self-destructive, even suicidal, self-deception—as our current situation demonstrates.

Separated from nature, we of modern society have lost our sense of what is truly sacred. Losing sight of the truly sacred, we fill the breach with a familiar story constantly affirmed in the public mind by pundits and economists schooled in what Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz has called a faith-based religion. Call it our Sacred Money story.

*Time is money. Money is wealth. Those who make money are society's wealth creators. Poverty is a sign of personal failure. Consumption is the path to happiness. Individualistic greed and competition are human virtues that the invisible hand of the free market directs to ends that create opportunity and prosperity for all. Those who would deprive society's wealth creators of the fruits of their labor engage in envy—a mortal sin. Maximizing financial gain is a moral and legal duty of business—indeed of each individual. Earth is a rock in space useful as source of free resources and a convenient waste dump.*

Over the past few decades this has become the story by which we define the purpose, meaning, and direction of society and of our individual lives and relationships. In its thrall, we embrace money as a sacred object of veneration and the measure of our human worth and accomplishment, banks as our temples, consumption as our solace, economists as our moral authorities, and free [unregulated] markets as a superhuman controlling power that rewards the faithful and torments the unfaithful.

The Sacred Money story frames the moral and intellectual foundation of a Sacred Money economics, otherwise known as neoliberal or market fundamentalist economics. This is

the economics taught as an objective values free science to business and economics students in virtually all the world's colleges and universities.

False on every point, it perverts our sense of values and assures the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a financial oligarchy. It is neither a true science nor a true religion. It is an immoral, anti-democratic political ideology at odds both with the moral teachings of all the world's great religions and the findings of contemporary science.

The immoral and intellectually false premises of the Sacred Money story sets us up to measure economic performance by financial metrics like GDP and stock price indices like the Dow Jones Average.

GDP is in substantial measure an indicator of the rate at which we are monetizing relationships previously based on mutual caring. This process destroys the natural bonds of family and community, while increasing our dependence on obtaining money controlled by global finance to purchase goods and services offered for sale by global corporations that serve global finance.

With a similar bias in favor of financial interests, stock price indices are primarily an indicator of the rate at which the inflation of financial assets is increasing the power of those who own financial assets relative to the power of those who do not.

Contrast the Sacred Money story of Sacred Money economics with this very different and more truthful Sacred Earth story. Imagine how different our world would be if this were the foundational story underlying the design and management of our economic institutions.

*Time is life. Life is the most precious of the many forms of wealth. As living beings, we survive and prosper only as contributing members of a living Earth Community evolving toward ever-greater beauty, complexity, self-awareness, and possibility. Making time for life—to experience and serve—is the path to happiness and well-being. Equality, community, and connection to nature are essential foundations of human health and happiness. It is our human nature to care and to share. Earth is our sacred mother. As she loves and nurtures us, we must love and care for her. The institutions of business, government, and civil society exist for only one purpose—to serve as vehicles through which we cultivate and express our true nature and create our means of living in service to the Earth Community to which we all belong.*

Fortunately, new communications technologies that connect nearly all the world's peoples make it possible for the first time in our history to rethink and choose as a species the stories by which we will live together in a shrinking and interdependent world—and to do so with extraordinary speed. It is thus within our means to change the human course as a conscious collective human choice.

To succeed, however, we need a shared sacred story of the origin, nature, and purpose of creation—a cosmology—that reflects the fullness of our current human knowledge, gives us a reason to live, and provides the frame for a new economy that supports healthy, life-serving relationships with one another and a living Earth.

## A Reason to Live

In 1992, my wife Fran and I returned to the United States from Asia and settled in New York City. While writing *When Corporations Rule the World*, I frequently gave talks pointing out that we humans are on a path of our own creation to potential species extinction, I often got a response something like:

“Yes, it may be true we are on a suicidal course, but changing our ways would be expensive and inconvenient. And if the doomsayers turn out to be wrong, we will have ended the party for nothing.”

I was stunned and dismayed. Then I chanced upon Thomas Berry’s book *Dream of the Earth* in which he observes:

“For people generally, their story of the universe and the human role in the universe is their primary source of intelligibility and value. The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation.”

Bingo: To care about our common future, we need a story of the origin, nature, and purpose of creation that reflects the fullness of our current human knowledge, gives us a reason to live, and serves as our guide to forming healthy, mature relationships with one another and a living Earth.

## Three Defining Creation Stories

Three story candidates have established currency in Western culture: the Distant Patriarch, the Grand Machine, and the Integral Spirit. The first two are instantly familiar, but inadequate to the needs of our time. Only the third serves the needs of our time, but lacks a defined public presence and institutional sponsorship. Here is a quick review.

### *Distant Patriarch*

The **Distant Patriarch** story is most commonly associated with the institutions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It views creation as the work of an all-knowing, all-powerful God who, from his home in a separate, sacred dimension called Heaven observes and judges our obedience to His commandments as handed down to us through sacred texts and interpreted by His anointed religious authorities. This story focuses our attention on our individual relationships with a personal but distant God and on access to the afterlife as our primary purpose in our present life.

Because all that happens in this life is by God’s will, it logically follows that those who possess great wealth and power in our present life are His favored and thereby poses divine authority. The economy is a vehicle for producing our sustenance until death releases us from the burden of Earthly labor.

I once heard a woman on a radio call in show say that she thinks of her life on Earth as nothing more than a short stay over in a cheap hotel on the way to Heaven. That is her

story. No way can we expect her to accept responsibility for the upkeep of the cheap hotel or concern herself with the plight of its less fortunate residents.

### *Grand Machine*

The **Grand Machine** is standard story of Newtonian physics and classical evolutionary biology commonly associated with science and the secular academy.

By the reckoning of this story, we live in a clock works universe in which only the material is real. Life is merely an accidental outcome of material complexity and has no meaning. Only the material is real. Consciousness and free will, or agency, are illusions.

Our fate thus depends on forces beyond our ability to influence or control in reality without meaning, purpose, or moral foundation.

Life evolves through a brutal competition for survival, territory, and reproductive advantage much as the global corporations we depend on as the drivers of economic progress. Earth is only a pool of cheap resources and a place to dispose our wastes.

In a desperate search for meaning, or at least a distraction from terrible loneliness of a life without meaning in an uncaring universe, we turn to the pursuit of money and material indulgence as our source of solace and sacred purpose. We assess the economy's performance accordingly. Having a bad day? Go shopping.

For more than six centuries, science and religion have engaged in mortal combat for recognition as the primary story keeper of Western civilization. Yet each contributes to the intellectual and moral foundation of the suicidal Sacred Money economy that drives our self-destruction.

### *Integral Spirit*

The **Integral Spirit** story has ancient roots and is affirmed by our inner awareness, indigenous wisdom, the teachings of the prophets, the findings of science, and our daily experience. It is the story that I believe resides in some form in the heart of every person, even though it lacks institutional support and public visibility. If this assessment is correct, we need only provide a source of public affirmation to bring it to the fore of public consciousness as a shared story of humanity.

By the reckoning of this story, all of creation is the expression of an integral spiritual intelligence engaged in a sacred journey to discover and actualize its possibilities through an ongoing process of becoming. In this story of God as spirit rather than patriarch, the material universe of our experience are more than God's creation—it is God made flesh. God is in the world and the world is in God, yet they are not identical.

The spirit is both imminent and transcendent; a concept referred to by religious scholars as panentheism.

We come to know the nature, purpose, and intention of this divine force through both our inner experience and our observation of its physical manifestation. All beings, stars, planets, humans, animals, plants, rocks, and rivers are expressions of this divine force—each with its place and function in the journey of the whole. Through its lens, we view

the beauty and vastness of a self-organizing constantly evolving cosmos with a sense of awe, wonder, and profound meaning.

Far from being alone in an uncaring cosmos, we are all deeply and irrevocably interconnected. To the extent that we accept our human responsibility to and for the whole well-being and continued creative unfolding of the whole, our lives take on profound meaning and purpose.

Our obligation to love and care for our Earth mother as she loves and cares for us, becomes self-evident. We come to recognize our species as creation's bold experiment in the capacity of a species with a highly advanced capacity for self-aware consciousness and choice to contribute to the creative journey of the whole.

## **Life's Capacity for Creative Self-Organization**

Disciplined observation of life's self-organizing structures and dynamics provides many insights to guide our rethinking and restructuring of human institutions and relationships.

Let's start with the human body, a particularly intimate demonstration of life's extraordinary capacity for conscious, intelligent self-organization. My body, as is yours, is comprised of tens of trillions of individual living cells and organisms, each a decision-making entity in its own right; each with the ability to manage and maintain its own health and integrity and at the same time work in concert with the body's countless other cells to maintain the health and resilience of the larger whole that is me; that is each of us. The degree and complexity of the coordination and cooperation involved is breathtaking beyond human imagination—yet it is so seamless, so familiar we take it for granted.

Together these cells maintain our body's health and integrity even under conditions of extreme stress and deprivation to create a capacity for extraordinary feats of physical grace and intellectual acuity far beyond the capability of the individual cells that comprise it. Indeed, there is no way we could possibly discern the body's demonstrated capabilities merely by the study of its individual physical parts.

Another stunning demonstration of life's capacity for intelligent, cooperative, self-organization is Earth's biosphere, the exquisitely complex, resilient, and continuously evolving layer of Earth life.

## **When We Fail to Honor Our Sacred Mother**

According to evolutionary biologists, the first living organisms appeared on Earth some 3.6 billion years ago. As their numbers and diversity increased, they organized themselves into a planetary-scale living system comprised of trillions of trillions of individual choice-making living organisms that work together to optimize the capture, organization, and sharing of available energy, water, and nutrients resources to bring Sacred Earth to life. Acting with no discernible source of central direction, they continuously renew Earth's soils, rivers, aquifers, fisheries, forests, and grasslands while

maintaining global climatic balance and the composition of Earth's atmosphere to meet the requirements of the widely varied life forms that comprise Earth's community of life.

All the while, constantly experimenting, testing, and learning this living system—a living superorganism in its own right—evolves toward ever-greater complexity, beauty, and creative potential—sometimes with what seems an impossible foresight.

In the course of their participation in this grand evolutionary journey, Earth's living organisms together filtered excess carbon and a vast variety of toxins from Earth's air, waters, and soils and sequestered them deep underground. In so doing, this grand alliance of seemingly primitive species, created the environmental conditions suited to the emergence of a highly advanced species with an extraordinary capacity for conscious self-reflective choice.

So how have we humans chosen to use this precious gift of our unique capacity for self-reflective choice? We dedicate our best minds and most advanced technologies to the extraction and release of these sequestered carbons and toxins back into Earth's atmosphere, waters, and soils in a foolhardy effort to dominate, suppress, and control the natural processes of a living Earth that make our lives possible.

Our current life destructive, climate disruptive, and hugely profitable expansion of tar sands oil extraction, deep-sea oil drilling, hydraulic fracture natural gas extraction, and mountaintop-coal removal is only a particularly visible current example of this ungrateful insanity.

An economic system based on the premise that money is more valuable than life regards this extraction as essential to jobs and profits. We treat the related economic, social, environmental, and governance devastation as simply regrettable collateral damage. Can we truly presume to be an intelligent species?

If we step back and take in the bigger picture, we see an economy structured and managed as if it were our human purpose to disrupt Earth's climate, poison its air and water, destroy the natural fertility of its soils, and eliminate all of nature's species other than those we choose to serve on our dinner table. Imagine our reaction if this were being done to us by an alien species from outer space. We would be mobilizing every resource at our command to protect our Sacred Earth mother—which is exactly what we should now be doing.

Of course, the destruction of Earth's capacity to sustain higher life forms is no one's actual intention.

## What We Teach

We have convinced ourselves that by maximizing growth in corporate profits, GDP, and the financial assets of a ruling oligarchy we move forward on a path to wealth and prosperity for all. The resulting financial instability, social, and environmental collapse and governance failure are simply collateral damage. No harm intended. It's just business.



Speaking with the authority of a holder of MBA and PhD degrees from the Stanford Business School and a former Harvard Business School professor, I am deeply aware that our colleges and universities train our economics and business graduates to serve and defend the institutions responsible for this travesty and the values and theories these institutions propagate. Discussion of the connection between the theories and methods thus taught and the consequences isn't part of the approved curriculum.

The last course I taught at the Harvard Business School was a doctoral seminar on The Future of Business. It was a course I developed and presented shortly after the release of the landmark Club of Rome report on the Limits to Growth. I engaged my students in exploring the implications for how we assess business performance and how we train our future business leaders.

As I said, it was the last course I taught at the Harvard Business School. I got word back from another professor through one of my students that the mission of the Harvard Business School is to train its students to succeed in the system of business, as it exists, not to change the system. Preparing its students to change the system of business is exactly what the responsible 21<sup>st</sup> century business school must do.

I left Harvard the end of 1977 and moved to Asia where I came into intimate contact with the front line real world drama of failing economic doctrines and institutions. It proved to be the most important and intellectually liberating experience of my life. I have never since considered a return to academia.

## Design for a Sacred Earth Economy

Irrespective of whether we call it a new economy, a living economy, a life-serving economy, or a sacred Earth economy, the structure and dynamics of the economy we must now create will align and integrate with the structure and dynamics of Earth's biosphere.

The biosphere segments itself into self-reliant, self-regenerative bioregional communities, each engaged in the constant capture, sharing, and regeneration of the nutrients, energy

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and water required to maintain the health and vitality of all of its resident organisms. Each contributes. Each benefits. We must do the same.

Our future depends on learning to assimilate into and function as responsible members of these generative living communities. We will trade a portion of our material surplus with our neighbors, but will assure that the exchange is fair and balanced, that all trading partners remain self-reliant in meeting their essential needs, and that information, culture, and beneficial knowledge and technology are freely shared.

Given the need for creative micro adaptation to local conditions everywhere it is impossible to achieve Earth balance between people and nature through the central direction of local action. As with the biosphere, our human economies must self-organize locally everywhere, recognizing that if the people of each bioregion are living in sustainable balanced relationship with their local ecosystems then we, as a species, will be in global balance with our Sacred Earth mother.

The transition from a Sacred Money economy to a Sacred Earth economy requires a deep institutional transformation to shift power from Wall Street financial markets that value and serve only money to living communities of place for which life is the defining value and purpose.

## Sacred Earth Ecologists

Sacred Money economists guide the design and management of the institutions of the Sacred Money economy. We need a professional cadre of Sacred Earth ecologists to oversee the design and management of the institutions of the Sacred Earth economy. As the Sacred Money economist asks, “What will generate the greatest financial return?” the Sacred Earth ecologist will ask, [“What would Nature do?”](#)

Sacred Earth ecologists will embrace life as their defining value, derive their decision rules from their observation of living systems, and draw insight from all the many established disciplines ranging from physics, biology, and ecology to psychology, anthropology, and theology. More than interdisciplinary, they will be trans-disciplinary—meaning they will look beyond the self-limiting old paradigm frames of established disciplines.

In their choice of performance indicators, Sacred Money economists prefer financial metrics like GDP and stock price indices that, as I noted earlier, count erosion of the caring relationships of family and community and the concentration of financial power as progress. Sacred Earth ecologists prefer living indicators of the health and happiness of our children, families, communities, and natural systems. They recognize that far from being a measure of benefit, GDP is best understood as an indicator of the economic cost of achieving a given level of well-being.

Sacred Money economists oversee a financial system that concentrates the powers of ownership and money in unregulated Wall Street financial institutions accountable only to impersonal market forces. They argue that this maximizes financial efficiency—by which they mean maximizing financial returns to the owners of financial assets. Wall Street financial institutions have little connection to or interest in local communities and generally find it most convenient and profitable to engage in speculative trading and

other predatory financial games that contribute nothing to providing good jobs and creating real wealth.

Sacred Earth ecologists recognize that ownership and the control of money is power. If power resides in global financial markets, decisions will favor financial interests. If it resides with real people who have a stake in their communities and natural environment decisions are far more likely to support human, family community and natural health.

The Sacred Earth ecologist will favor community rooted cooperatively owned financial institutions, as for example mutual banks and credit unions where local people and safely deposit their savings to be recycled in the community to finance local businesses and home ownership. These local financial institutions allow communities to create their own credit in response to local needs and opportunities.

The same principles apply to ownership more generally. It is a priority of the Sacred Earth ecologist to maximize the localization and distribution of ownership, utilizing cooperative ownership models for larger scale enterprises— thus distributing power and rooting it in communities of place.

So who are these sacred Earth ecologists? Two of your local environmental heroes, David Suzuki and Bill Rees would be among them. Too few, they are pioneers of a new field of expertise yet to be defined. Development of this new field represents one of the defining intellectual challenges of our time.

## Sacred Earth Legal Scholars

We face a similar challenge with respect to the law. By the reckoning of prevailing Sacred Money legal doctrine, corporations [legally protected pools of money] are the most sacred of institutions and their rights are the most sacred of rights—a doctrine famously and shamelessly promoted by the U.S. Supreme Court. Under this doctrine, nature is nothing more than property subject to exploitation at the will of its owners.

A Sacred Earth legal system will recognize that we humans survive and prosper only as members of a vibrant, living Earth Community. Living Earth is therefore the most sacred of beings and its rights, the rights of nature, are the most sacred of rights. Corporations, on the other hand, are property. The only reason for a corporation to exist is to serve the living community that created it by issuing its charter.

## Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

For the most part, our existing educational programs and institutions proudly and aggressively prepare their graduates for jobs in failing institutions that we must now replace—and the sooner the better. Not only must future graduates be prepared to serve [new institutional forms that support ecological balance, shared prosperity, and living democracy](#), they must be prepared to create them anew with few models from which to learn. It isn't just about young people. The entire society must be retooled and re-skilled—immediately.

Few of our existing institutions of higher learning are prepared to address this challenge. .

The academy currently organizes by narrowly defined academic disciplines and trains its graduates to think and act within similarly confining intellectual silos. This is among the reasons why modern societies are now in such deep crisis.

Sacred Earth organizes as interlinked living systems. The academic programs of the future must produce citizens who think and act in terms of complex, interconnected, living systems, not narrow disciplines.

Working out the specifics of essential institutional reforms will require deep reflection and rigorous debate. Here are some initial suggestions.

1. Liberate the minds of faculty and students by removing the walls that divide the university into isolated disciplines isolated from the communities in which their students will eventually live and work. Organize faculty and students into interdisciplinary learning teams and engage them in solving real world problems and restructuring critical institutional systems in ways that align with ecosystem structures and processes. Focus less on specialized degree programs and more on life-long learning.
2. Teach history as an examination of the large forces that shape the human course to deepen understanding of how large-scale social change happens.
3. Replace economics departments with departments of ecology. Invite Sacred Money economists to retire, retrain as Sacred Earth ecologists, or to teach economics as one of a number of courses on the intellectual failures of 20<sup>th</sup> century that brought humanity to the brink of self-destruction.
4. Replace the metaphor of the machine with the metaphor of the living organism as the academy's defining intellectual frame. Staff departments of biology and ecology with new biologists who strive to understand life on its own terms rather than through the dead world lens of reductionist Newtonian physics.
5. Introduce Law School courses exploring the nature, structure, and doctrines of a Sacred Earth/Rights of Nature legal system.

This is a heavy agenda. If you're not feeling a bit overwhelmed you weren't paying attention.

This seems a good time to take a break with an inspiring song from Raffi, a local celebrity. Raffi holds office here in Vancouver and lives on nearby Salt Spring Island. How many of you grew up with his music?

Raffi recorded this song, ["No Wall Too Tall"](#) to celebrate the launch of my most recent book, [\*Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth. A Declaration of Independence from Wall Street.\*](#) We first played it when I launched the book from the pulpit of the historic Trinity Wall Street Church at the foot of Wall Street with a call to bring down the temples of the Wall Street money worshippers. Tonight we include a call to bring down the walls that separate the university from the community and the walls between disciplines. I want you to all get up and dance with me.

## Moment of Readiness

Breakthroughs in public consciousness take hold only at rare moments of readiness. I have observed over the past year indications from a multitude of colleagues and institutions that we have arrived at a moment of unprecedented readiness to engage a public conversation re-examining our most foundational beliefs, exploring our nature as spiritual beings, and embracing our responsibility for the care of our Sacred Earth mother.

There is abundant evidence that everyone enjoys greater psychological and physical health in more equal societies with a strong sense of community and deep connection to nature.

The transition will require temporary sacrifices for the few, but on balance, it represents an opportunity for us all to grow in understanding and spiritual maturity, rebuild community, and achieve true happiness. There is no solution to the unfolding human crisis within a system based on demonstrably false values and flawed assumptions. This presents a strong challenge for colleges and universities that to an alarming extent still teach the false values and theories that bear major responsibility for society's moral and institutional failure.

The necessary leadership for cultural and institutional transformation is unlikely to come from within tired, siloed, old paradigm academic disciplines and departments controlled by entrenched interests. It is more likely to come from the demands and leadership of conscious, informed, and outraged students working in alliance with individual faculty members and others who recognize the failure and want to be part of the solution.

You, the vanguard of an emerging and potentially decisive youth movement demanding the transformation of outdated academic institutions and curricula that charge too much and deliver too little, may hold the key to a positive and prosperous human future.

We humans are engaged in a monumental work of reinventing our societies and ourselves. I believe it is the most exciting intellectual challenge and creative opportunity in the whole of the human experience. You are among the company of those at the leading edge.

Thank you for your commitment— and for your attention.

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[Dr. David Korten](#) is the author of [Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth](#), [The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community](#), [The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism](#), and the international best seller [When Corporations Rule the World](#). He is board chair of [YES! Magazine](#), co-chair of the [New Economy Working Group](#), a founding board member emeritus of the [Business Alliance for Local Living Economies](#), president of the [Living Economies Forum](#), an associate fellow of the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), and a member of the [Club of Rome](#). He earned MBA and PhD degrees from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business and served on the faculty of the Harvard Business School. [He blogs for YES! Magazine](#). This presentation draws extensively from his essay ["Religion, Science, and Spirit: A Sacred Story for Our Time."](#)