

## **Naming Our "No-Name" Worldview**

by Christopher Forrest McDowell, Ph.D.

The oldest known document depicting an individual whose conscience is in a state of conflict with collective beliefs is an Egyptian papyrus known as "The Dialogue of a World-Weary Man With His Ba." The papyrus dates from the period around 2200 B.C. The world-weary man apparently has too much insight into the collective injustices of his time. He suffers from this and feels alienated, because he is too conscious for his contemporaries and sees too much. He wishes to commit suicide and turns to his "Ba" soul, a representation of his personal conscience, for advice. I open with this auspicious bit of history because it appeared to depict the very state I found myself in approximately ten years ago. A state of mind which seemed very much preoccupied with death, but on closer examination a death revealed only as a pivotal transformation of consciousness from an old worldview belief system to that of a somewhat nebulous new one. I felt destined to live with my meager bit of palliation, but it was a statement in Marilyn Ferguson's **Aquarian Conspiracy**, which she attributed to the editor of a literary magazine, which finally affirmed my new worldview search. This journalist talked about how his ability to take notes and ask the right questions evaporated on a sunny beach in Spain, when "I suddenly became aware that the whole world was alive . . . I saw the earth breathe, I felt its rhythms, and I discovered a missing part of myself." Finally! I could see myself in the space of discovery of someone else, but it was his final comment that suddenly led me on a long journey into my own "Ba" soul. For my new unmet friend concluded: "I began the long, slow drift away from the radical mainstream towards shores for which I've yet to find a name."

That editor, of course, to whom Ferguson was referring, was none other than Sy Safransky, of this ubiquitous journal. I do not know if Sy has ever found a name for his new worldview, but my sense is that, if you have not, Sy, you are not alone. Over these past ten years, I have listened to speaker after speaker at conference after conference express their excitement at the emergence of a whole new way to view life, but they never name that view. Over and over again I have heard talk about the old Cartesian model of male-dominance, exploitation of nature, women, and cultures, the mechanistic interpretation of life, the glorification of the rational, and the separation of mind from matter at the expense of the spirit, but this old model is not put into perspective by naming the new model. I have heard the familiar hailing of a new age of peace, cooperation, equality, wholeness, spirituality, and ecological responsibility all of which seem to be rising up out of the midst of disdain for rabid technology, greed, insensitivity, and over consumption, but there does not appear to be one word which embraces and enfolds these new age characteristics. Finally, we are presented with concepts like Deep Ecology, the Gaia Hypothesis, Ecofeminism, the Green Movement, Chaos and General Systems Theory, Bioregionalism, among many others (including Ferguson's ill-fated "Aquarian Conspiracy"). But my sense is that these important and viable concepts are like code words which allow the master planners of our new worldview to talk among

themselves, periodically recruiting the acceptance of many millions of new age people who are predictably starved for a common reference point upon which to base their devotion. The fact is, as architects and builders of this beautiful new worldview, we have done a splendid job of *not* naming it, and thus have unwittingly shown to those entrenched Cartesian holdouts --- military leaders, totalitarian leaders, corporate leaders, abusive males, the technological purists --- that, as a bunch of idealists "in process," we are simply another historical resurgence of an old familiar pacifist, effeminate energy which will ultimately settle down into the mediocre pattern of cultural evolution after we momentarily whine about not getting our fair share. Not true.

The truth is, something *is* afoot in the minds and hearts of millions of people, and that something is much greater and more powerful than we can ever imagine. That something is more than a worldview, it is a new *Earthview*. It is more than a self-serving view, it is a *compassionate Lifeview*. It is more than the common view of the common person. It is a *noble view* of the value within every species on this planet. In short, that something-afoot is a view from within the wisdom of our conscience, the knowing that the existence of every piece of matter on this Earth is important, and for that reason, and that reason alone, built into the infrastructure of every relationship must be the necessity of respect .

Perhaps one of the major characteristics of our new worldview, then, would appear to be an emphasis on building qualities founded upon respect for interrelatedness, interdependency, interconnectedness, and partnership at all levels of existence. I perceive our new worldview to have a deep compassion for knowing that its underlying foundation or essence brings this wounded Earth back into connectedness. Surely, it is this need for interconnectedness, or what Riane Eisler calls "partnership," which bonds people to this new Earthview. But meaningful relationship in and of itself just does not happen as a matter of chance. Rather it is a choice, and it is a choice that must come from a clear vision, not merely within the mind, but from within the heart. As the Greek novelist, Nikos Kazantzakis suggests, "The new earth exists only in the heart." It is thus that people's deep yearning today is to find heart-felt reflective meaning in life that restores a sense of dignity to it, and they want to discover this dignity in a new vision of Earth --- beneath the skin of nature, beneath the mind of humanity.

This deep sense of desirable respect, I believe, is echoed in the word *reverence*. It is in reverence that people want to inhabit this "new earth." They want to feel it breathe and to inhale its breath; touch its countenance and be touched in return. They want to know that life, be it man, woman, child, animal, plant, mineral, in whatever form, is given a chance to feel and inhale its own existence, and touch and be touched by the compassion of others. In short, people want to bond to life in a way deeper than any experienced before on Earth. They want to bond to life in a noble way which embraces respect, courtesy, and life-affirming reverence.

There is a lot of talk these days about a cultural transformation, one that helps us to wade through the waves of confusion which overtake long-established belief systems at a historical

paradigm shift. But underlying any sense of transformation we can perceive happening outside ourselves, we must awaken to the fact that it is ultimately our personal transformation, as painful as it always seems to be, which leads us to the shores of an increased inner consciousness and conscience. What I am trying to say is that if we are to talk about any new worldview, we cannot objectively do so as if it were some sort of commodity invented outside of our control or desire. Like our name, our personal worldview gives meaning to our overall sense of self, thus it is something we own within and use to shape our life. Much of our present upheaval in consciousness has to do with the realization of how little control we have had in the evolution of our society, much less the world. The problem, as Eisler has poignantly pointed out in her book, **The Chalice and the Blade**, is that a five thousand year old male-dominant model, exemplified by the most recent 300 year old Cartesian worldview, was not owned by the people, nor was it reasonable for and of the people. As we now know, our desires and needs have been owned by exploitive corporations, unprincipled politicians and leaders, extractive technologies, zealous religious ideologies, and the persuasive "priests" of the media marketplace. The ultimate strategy of such a worldview is to instill in the minds of people the notion that everything they desire, whether materially or spiritually, can be found outside oneself. And the measure of success of this strategy is essentially how little control people have in their lives, whether they know it or not.

Our new worldview must be perceived to be co-owned by, and reasonably for, every species on this planet. It is only in this sense that we or any species can personally feel control in the healing restoration and regeneration of life. I have suggested that this great compassionate force has something to do with noble respect and reverence, and this is a great start for naming our new worldview. There are many of us now standing on the shores of this new worldview. In one sense, we have been like midwives who have given birth to a beautiful new "beingness," and this new Earthview/Lifeview deserves to have a worthy name that reflects the full embodiment of our venerable spirit.

I know of no better word to describe this recurring historical need for interrelatedness and reciprocal respect among individuals, cultures, and species of nature/Earth, than the beautiful ancient French word, **Cortesia** (pronounced *cortesia*). Yes, I know what your first reaction is, Sy. How can I propose a *Cortesian* worldview when it appears to be so similar (woe to typographical errors!) in spelling to the old *Cartesian* worldview we so disdain? Well, hear me out, dear friend, for certainly there must be some cosmic meaning (perhaps joke?) behind their relationship, namely that they are as different as night and day, and in fact must forever be a reminder of how a subtle shift in consciousness can yield incredible changes in conscience. At best, my hope for **Cortesian Consciousness** is buoyed by a comment Cambridge professor, W.I.B. Beveridge once made: "It is easier to drop the old hypothesis if one can find a new one to replace it. The feeling of disappointment too will then vanish."

**Cortesía** is an ancient French word meaning manners, or specifically the behavior and etiquette expected of one who serves at a noble court (demonstrated, for example, by Chaucer's noble knight in **Canterbury Tales**). The most obvious English translation for **Cortesía** is "courtesy," but courtesy today has a more superficial meaning than it did about a thousand years ago. The original use of the word *cortesía* was to describe nobility of character and conduct, and at its deepest philosophical point *cortesía* described the recognition of rights, duties, gifts, and privileges as they exist in a reciprocal relationship of reverence.

Historically speaking, few people are aware that *cortesía* may have been the embracing philosophy of Saint Francis of Assisi, often revered as the patron saint of nature. If this is true, then for Saint Francis *cortesía* extended not only to human relations but to all creation in nature; it brought forth his enduring veneration in addressing every form of life as Brother or Sister. As a doctrine of belief, **Cortesian** respect can lay claim to a deep sense of personal integrity, and history (or at the least, myth) shows this to be exactly the noble quality of character St. Francis emitted. Romano Guardini described St. Francis as chivalrous --- *cortese*. "This word cannot be translated, because 'courteous' has another meaning now. In its original sense, the word bespoke a form of life, that of noble behavior. With Francis this noble behavior assumed a deep, inner sweetness, giving it a bell-like character of clarity and beauty." G.K. Chesterton, in referring to Saint Francis, said, "It is a rare poet who remembers his poetry at a moment of agony or crisis." The event towards which Chesterton ascribes these words was at that moment when the doctor brought the white-hot cauterizing iron towards Francis to treat his diseased eyes. Saint Francis bravely spoke: "I pray you, Brother Fire, be courteous to me." Truly, Saint Francis's model was not mere fraternity, it was one of reverential respect and unconditional courtesy within a deep knowing of the interconnectedness of all life. So keen was Francis's awareness of this divine covenant between humanity, nature, and God, that he preached "courtesy is one of the properties of God, who of His courtesy, gives His sun and rain to the just and the unjust: and courtesy is the sister of charity by which hatred is extinguished and love is cherished." Oh, if the world could model such convictions!

What we are talking about, then, in this one word, **Cortesía**, is something deeply perennial, personal, and universal, not just the life philosophy of an isolated historical figure. We are talking about a heart-felt feeling and a mental attitude of deep respect, courtesy, and awe and wonder that has permeated all of history through a perennial wisdom, often exemplified by native cultures, religions of the East, and radical Occidental philosophers, naturalists, scientists, and theologians. A contemporary and much revered cultural theologian, Thomas Berry, has suggested "we have lost our sense of courtesy toward the earth and its inhabitants, our sense of gratitude, our willingness to recognize the sacred character of habitat, our capacity for the awesome, for the numinous quality of every earthly reality." I believe that in **Cortesía** we can call up that gesture of noble courtesy which allows us in a simple, humble, and conscious act to praise and give thanks to that which we revere. And here we are again embracing that noble conduct of respect that can only be described in one

appropriate word: reverence. So intertwined are the meanings of *cortesía* and reverence (in fact, ancient French dictionaries speak of *cortesía* in terms of reverence), that for all practical purposes they are one and the same and may be spoken of in terms of a **Cortesian Consciousness**.

**Cortesian Consciousness**, therefore, reminds us that Cartesian methodology has been our teacher and its eye of reason has given us an image and instrumental understanding/use of nature, matter, and culture that we should not deny. For example, the Cartesian "great machine" perception of life is what has allowed us to experience incomprehensible technological progress. Technology as such is not what is wrong with the Cartesian model; it is how we have come to use technology to dominate and control others and nature that is the issue. The **Cortesian** steward is not out to destroy the concept of technology; they are out to reshape and enhance its use in reverent ways.

**Cortesía**, therefore, is not a worldview that denies the utility of Cartesian ideology, *if it is directed respectfully, courteously, and reverently*. In fact, the very likeness of the two words may be more ironical than we think, a historical testimony both to the dramatic and subtle change possible in consciousness and conscience, and thus a testimony to the changing course of history on Earth. Indeed, the mere changing of an "a" to an "o" in these two words must constantly be a reminder of the difference between an army of soldiers or an army of sages and stewards, between the darkness of our ignorance and the light of our wisdom, between the interplay of duality---hate and love, greed and selflessness, power and compassion, abuse and respect---and the lack of understanding which has always hounded the motives of humanity.

It is truly the shift in symbolic context of these two words, Cartesian and **Cortesian**, which will continue to provide dramatic proof of their bipolar content. For example, the Cartesian position of human mastery and dominance over nature gives way to a **Cortesian** stewardship promoting an interconnected and reciprocal relationship between cultures and nature. A Cartesian instrumental rationalism/interpretation of life gives way to a **Cortesian** heightening of intuition and reason both of which lead one to live life with a sense of discriminative wisdom. A Cartesian mechanistic assumption gives way to a **Cortesian** organic/biocentric systems perspective. A Cartesian patriarchal and male-God dominance gives way to a **Cortesian** gylanic (male-female partnership) and a perennial Ground Consciousness that honors a God/Goddess/Cosmic Force. A Cartesian split in mind and body gives way to a **Cortesian** holistic integration of bodymind bonded by the forces of spirit.

Mother Theresa states: "We cannot do great things in life; we can only do small things with great love." The very nature of **Cortesía** is personal ownership. **Cortesía** is not owned by a corporation, its board of directors, its investors, or its bylaws; it is owned by each person who is drawn to that corporation because its motives have the highest interests of human beings, cultures, and the natural environment in mind (as exemplified by those corporations who follow the Valdez Principles). **Cortesía** is not owned by politicians, governments or military leaders; it is owned by every person who is drawn into public service because the highest principles of the people and the

environment are perceived to be at the forefront of service. **Cortesia** is not exclusively owned by a man or woman, a race or culture, or a particular field of inquiry; it is owned by every species in the total biotic community which has the ability or opportunity to touch and be touched out of a gesture of awe and wonder and respect. Our present crisis on Earth, therefore, is not so much the outcome of an impersonal worldview gone awry; it is the result of unbridled personal desires gone wild in the face of misguided technology, politics, economics, and religion which we have come to put too much trust in. As Easwaran puts it: "We bear responsibility for the accomplishments of science, since we all support it --- financially, with our purchases and taxes, and in our mental habits, where we depend on technology for profit, prestige, and convenience." Since **Cortesian Reverence** is founded on humility, there is the belief in unified, interconnected personal noble thoughts and behaviors --- the small devotional expressions of common courtesy and respect toward the environment, toward other beings --- within the larger collective conatus. Such small devotional offerings of reverence form the base of a human **Cortesian** stewardship and trusteeship. They are the motivation behind vision quests in wilderness settings, organic gardening in an urban plot and regenerative agriculture in the fields; living with voluntary simplicity and composting, recycling, and pre-cycling. They are the incentive behind visiting cathedral forests, and establishing a land trust as a service primarily for nature itself; putting one's body on earth between bulldozer and forest as protest, and creating ceremony and ritual in replenishing and reseeded the land. Small reverential pieces of our **Cortesian Lifeview** group around sustainable culture and its possibility for the future. Bioregionalism speaks to the interconnectedness and interdependency of Earth life where concentric sizes of biotic communities, human and otherwise, are enmeshed in a unique life-affirming quest. **Cortesian** concepts such as networking, synergy, cooperation, decentralization, governance, and mediation attempt to sustain the bioregional persona, as do the noble goals and objectives of the Green Movement.

On certain levels, people are traversing across the old mental intellect that said "I am protecting myself." Many millions of people are now projecting their compassion by thinking and saying, "I am protecting, I want to help protect . . . the rainforest, the homeless, the starving, the endangered, the underprivileged, the next generations of children." But such thinking must go one step deeper into the heart, a step that places one directly in the reverential core of **Cortesia**. Such a **Cortesian** steward/trustee would peer into life with a thinking heart and a deeper noetic knowing, to paraphrase John Seed: "I am part of the rainforest, the homeless, the starving, the endangered, the underprivileged, the future generations of children *protecting myself*. I am that part of Gaia recently emerged into reverent consciousness." It is not enough to intellectually witness, from the safe distance of a television screen with T.V. dinner in hand, the swollen bellies of starving children. The **Cortesian** trustee *feels* the starving masses' pain within the belly of his/her own conscience, and s/he reaches out in compassionate thought by saying, to borrow from Eknath Easwaran's beautiful affirmation, "I want an Earth that is healthy, a world at peace, and a heart filled with love. I want my

life and every life to count. How can I serve toward this end?" Any other thought submits to only one other reality, one of a world of inequality and self-centeredness, where we are all starving --- the poor for food and hope, the rich for heart-felt compassion.

It is my belief that if we but name our new worldview, and to do so as a new Earthview and Lifeview, then we will be doing the most compassionate act imaginable for the orphaned pieces of history, and those many individuals, cultures, and species of nature who cannot, and will never, find a home in the Cartesian paradigm. Otherwise, if but one person is needlessly hungry, if but one tree is needlessly downed, if but one woman or child is needlessly abused, if but one atomic warhead is needlessly manufactured, and if but one precious enriching cultural or natural bit of history is erased from the record books, then the potential for individual and global self-realization of Earth's species is limited and the notion of survival will continue to be the rule in a world run by a few ideological masters at the Cartesian ideological machine.

In the final analysis, perhaps it can be said that the vision of every life on Earth has always been a vision of hope. The question is, In what context has this hope been placed? Who have we perceived this hope to serve? I believe that humanity's perennial intuition and wisdom has always been an archtypal knowing beyond that of the "innocent savage" of Paleolithic and Neolithic history, and the "noble savage" of the last 400 years. Interwoven throughout history has been a vision that within every man, woman, child, and species is his/her/its true Self on Earth: that of the **Noble Sage**. Motivated by a consciousness of reverence, we human Noble Sages seek a new lifeview of united heartmindspirit, in which we can serve in this Earthly court with profound courtesy and kindly consideration.

I am reminded once again, Sy, of your dilemma at coming to the shores of this new "no name" worldview. The fact is, your courage to swim away from the radical mainstream of world thought was a tremendous inspiration in my own courageous breaking away. But in breaking away, I found myself actually breaking *through* the old worldview, living as it were *in* the Cartesian worldview but not *of* it. But more than anything else, Sy, what gave my vision hope was the quote by Victor Frankl which sits directly beneath the masthead of your inspiring journal, **The Sun**: "What is to give light must endure burning." It has been my discovery that this **Cortesian** light has guided my heart along the same paths followed by other brave visionaries. And the flames of their perennial passions for truth still burn along the paths of history they traveled. These "heart torches" have been the guideposts for this new age and have led us directly and finally to **Cortesian Consciousness**. May I suggest that herein dwells the Noble Sage whose simple bit of wisdom has stood the test of time: "Do not live a life of quiet desperation; strive to live a life of humble devotion. Only then will life cease to be a personal burden, but become one of reverential service."

I am no longer the world-weary person I was years ago. Ten solid years of devotion to meditation, and service to Earth and her species/cultures has enflamed a passion and compassion within unlike I have ever felt. All of our efforts today need a new and vibrant common vision and

common voice. **Cortesian Consciousness** celebrates a Lifeview and Earthview founded on deep respect, noble courtesy, and abiding reverence. But more than anything else, **Cortesia** reconnects us with our ultimate capacity to love, and to carry the torch of that compassionate, reverential love wherever we may journey. On our journey perhaps we may have time to reflect upon the receding Cartesian worldview and draw our **Cortesian** strength on these words of Teilhard de Chardin: "Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, humans will have discovered fire." Keep your heart lamp burning, Sy.

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