

The *Cortesian* Bond:
Part I: A Perennial Chalice of Consciousness

by
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It goes without saying, we are living amongst such incredible cultural, environmental, and spiritual change that we are left grasping for some reference point that feels true to us on the inside. Indeed, the very nature of our heart-felt searching seems to stem from a deep need to bond anew with life: to affirm deeper connections with nature, Earth, native cultures, and our own sense of family/relationships; to affirm deeper expressions of service, commitment, and devotion; to affirm deeper groundedness with some great yet humble spiritual force which seems to hold this whole cosmic drama together with an inordinate amount of love, grace, and patience.

The popular literature has begun to promote this as being the Age of Ecology. I would suggest that, if anything, the underlying current that is constantly flowing throughout all of our efforts to reconnect with life, is more indicative of an age of bonding. Bonding calls up archetypal needs to confine in a matrix that is a worthy source of possibility, a worthy source of energy, and a safe place/ideal within which to experience life. Given these needs, bonding invokes images of deep yearning and relatedness, some prophetic journey or effort, and the discovery of a new vision and new voice.

Many people have a feeling that something tremendous was supposed to have happened in their lives but didn't. And they just do not know what it is. I like to believe that not one human (or other species, for that matter) wants to die without having some sense of what it really was their life stood for. Life, therefore, always seems to be healing the errors we make so that somewhere on our journey we in fact bond with the essence of life itself. Perhaps, then, this is our ultimate bonding: to find our heart's connection with life and the cosmos. Until then, we cannot expect to feel peace. We will roam the earth in search of a dream only our heart spirit knows and can communicate. In this sense, the words of Judith Welch-Ham have deep significance: "The price of peace is awareness, and awareness has a double face: one looking within and one looking without."

Each of us, accordingly, has a great yearning for wholeness and holiness, and to experience both within and without of our bodymindspirit, not with a superficial desirefulness, but with profound reverential awareness and devotion. This age of bonding, therefore, is driven by a yearning to interrelate with Earth, nature, species, cultures, our inner self, and some ultimate divine force, with sincerity, nobility, wisdom, and compassion; with conscious vibrancy, vitality, celebration, and deep reverence for life. The alternative is to continue living in a world filled with greed, exploitation, arrogance, insensitivity, poverty, and impending global death.

Today, the yearning to find the essential purpose of our life has led many of us on a long journey to a new shore of human and planetary consciousness. These shores are substantially different than those of the old Cartesian worldview of the past 300 years, a worldview which promoted male dominance, exploitation of nature, women, and cultures, a mechanistic and purely technological/scientific/deterministic/rational interpretation of life, and a separation of mind from matter at the expense of the spirit. Indeed, the images of a new *Earthview/Lifeview* embrace more sustainable expressions of life through peace, cooperation, equality, wholeness, spirituality, and ecological responsibility.

For the past ten years I have been particularly interested in the essential nature of these new shores of human and ecological consciousness. Obviously, I too have felt that deep yearning to find my place within the scheme of planetary-cosmic existence, and I too have been journeying among a new landscape of consciousness in order to bond with my purpose. I have witnessed the birth and evolution of key matrices within our new *Earthview/Lifeview*. For example, the re-emergence of the Goddess symbology, and especially with reference to the identification of Earth as Gaia, has given many people on their journey of consciousness a worthy matrix in which to take-in and direct a compassionate energy. On a quasi-political level, the Green Movement has emerged as yet another viable matrix, in whose platform is the source of a major amount of broad caring energy. And in a third example, deep ecology and ecofeminism have both also emerged as ecocentric (rather than purely homocentric) matrices which serve as a source of egalitarian energy toward respecting life on global and bioregional levels. Indeed, many sustainable matrices are appearing throughout all walks of life, and each seems to be leading us to a renewed bonding with life.

Still in all, I have often wondered, what is it at the nucleus of our new *Earthview/Lifeview* that all these emerging matrices have in common? For the moment, I am not talking about an obvious response such as God/Goddess or even the force of love. I am suggesting more of a core of behavior which flows through each new matrix of consciousness, sort of like the chalice from which the motives of these matrices pour forth, and which forms the bonding agent or essence between these matrices and their human and natural constituents.

That essence, I believe, is something deeply perennial, deeply personal, and universal in scope. We are talking about a sustained heart-felt feeling and 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. Probably no one better than the cultural scholar, Thomas Berry, has spoken about this *Lifeview/Earthview* essence when he suggested that, "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." Truly, if we are to deepen our life's purpose and

direction, we must recognize that our heart's energy pours forth from a great need for *respect*, *courtesy*, and maintaining a sense of awe and wonder, as *reverence*, about the sacredness of all interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent species and natural forces on Earth, if not within the universe.

After years of struggling to conceptualize our new (and perennially re-emerging) perception of life through meditation and scholarly study, about five years ago I came across an ancient French word used quite sparingly almost 1000 years ago, only because within it evokes a quality of character reserved for only a few worthy of it. Fittingly so, however, I believe it is a word which best describes our deepening consciousness today, and perhaps represents that key metaphor, ideological theme, or bond we have been struggling to find in our personal and globally emerging new cosmology, myth, and story.

The word of which I speak is **Cortesia** (pronounced *cortesia*). The most obvious English translation for **Cortesia** is "courtesy," but courtesy today has a more superficial meaning than it did at the time Saint Francis was alive, and to whom has been ascribed the deep convictual use of the term. The original use of the word was to describe nobility of character and conduct, and at its deepest philosophical point **Cortesia** described the recognition of rights, duties, gifts, and privileges as they exist in reciprocal relationship (once again, one is reminded of St. Francis's deep sense of integrity and respect for all creation as brought forth in his enduring veneration for addressing every form of life as Brother or Sister). I believe that it is in **Cortesia** that we can call up once again 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. In fact, so intertwined are the meanings of *cortesia* and reverence (ancient French dictionaries speak of *cortesia* 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**.

I do not question the uncanny similarity between the two words, the old Cartesian worldview and the new **Cortesian Lifeview/Earthview**. In fact, the very likeness of the two words may be more ironical than we think, a historical testimony to both the dramatic and subtle change possible in consciousness and conscience, and thus a testimony to the changing course of history on Earth today. 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 creatively explore 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 perennial divine (God/Goddess/Ground Consciousness) sacredness and wisdom. A Cartesian split in mind and body gives way to a **Cortesian** integration of bodymind bonded by the forces of spirit.

Cortesian Consciousness, in summary, celebrates a Lifeview and Earthview founded on deep respect, noble courtesy, and abiding reverence within reciprocal relationship. In **Cortesia**, I believe, is echoed the compassionate plea of many who affirm: "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?" **Cortesia** may indeed be the sacred sustainable chalice from which to pour forth our essential need to serve life (and be served by life) with respect, courtesy, and reverence. It may provide the overarching matrix from which all our new age movements emerge and evolve.

It goes without saying, one of the major characteristics of our new cosmology is an emphasis on building qualities founded upon respect for interrelatedness, interdependency, interconnectedness, and partnership at all levels of existence. I perceive our new Earthview/Lifeview 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 level of consciousness. 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.

I know of no better word to describe this deep sense of desirable respect than that of **Cortesia**. It is in a covenant of **Cortesian** 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 breath-like 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 the restorative, regenerative, and sustaining powers of respect, courtesy, and life-affirming reverence.

Consider for the next few weeks how you perceive this **Cortesian** consciousness permeating your life, and the way life is conducted around you. See if you can determine emerging demonstrations of **Cortesian** economics, politics, and business practices. Observe **Cortesian** gestures toward the environment, within science and law, within relationships, within the way people and natural species are treated. In every instance determine if behaviors are generated from a nucleus of reciprocal respect, courtesy, and/or reverence, or from insensitivity, exploitation, dominance, and (human) self-centeredness. What you will find emerging in your consciousness is the discovery of a compassionate, reverential **Cortesian Self** unlike any image of an old Cartesian self. In Part 2 of this series we will explore further this **Cortesian** consciousness, both its attunements and bonding principles.

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