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# Traditional and Contemporary Eco-Cosmologies within Western and Christian Indigenous Traditions;

*Seeking Sustainability through recognition of Integral Interconnection*



Eco-cosmology, Sustainability and a Spirit of Resilience Conference,  
University College Cork, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018

Edmond Byrne  
School of Engineering /  
Sustainability in Society Research Group

## An Integral Cosmology => Universal Interconnection

"The universe is a communion of subjects  
rather than a collection of objects"

Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story*

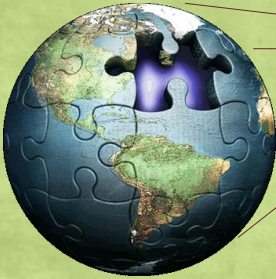
"We lose our souls if we lose the experience of the forest,  
the butterflies, the song of the birds,  
if we can't see the stars at night."

Thomas Berry



## The Project of Modernity; An Age of 'Reduction and Separation'

Descartes' (1596-1650) philosophy sought **certainty** through **rationality**, based on an **antagonistic dualism** between the **objective** physical mechanical body & the entirely **separate subjective** mind/soul.



Amid the turmoil of the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century (war, turmoil, climate change) Descartes' thesis was a resounding success, and continues to be..



## The Project of Modernity; Paradigm of Reduction and Separation

Promotes an **Individualistic Consumerism** via an **Ideology** of (infinite) **Growth**, the driving force behind the contemporary **Crisis of Unsustainability**, as manifested by:

- **Climate change**
- **Biodiversity and cultural loss/extinction**
- **Increased globalised uniformity**, over cultural/anthropogenic diversity
- **Increased individualism/narcissism**, over collective/community
- **Increased anxiety**, individually and societally
- **Throwaway materialistic consumerism**
- *etc., etc..*

The project of reductionist modernity, which has promised and delivered great power, control and goods to privileged purveyors, has been too smart for its own good.

Driven by left brained hubris, **Uber-Smart Progress** trumps **accumulated Wisdom!** `


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07 SEPTEMBER 2018

## Electric Picnic Highlights Throwaway Society








(Source: inhabitat.com)

News / India / Bengaluru's Bellandur lake catches fire again, toxic smoke over IT city's suburb

## Bengaluru's Bellandur lake catches fire again, toxic smoke over IT city's suburb



**Rohini Swamy**  
 Bengaluru  
 February 17, 2017  
 UPDATED: February 17, 2017 12:42 IST  
[Follow @Rohini\\_Swamy](#)



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### HIGHLIGHTS

Bengaluru's Bellandur lake catches fire again.



Bellandur lake catches fire.

**B**engaluru's Bellandur lake is in news again. A fire broke out at this lake, considered to be one of the biggest in the city, on Thursday evening sending out huge cloud of toxic smoke causing panic among locals.

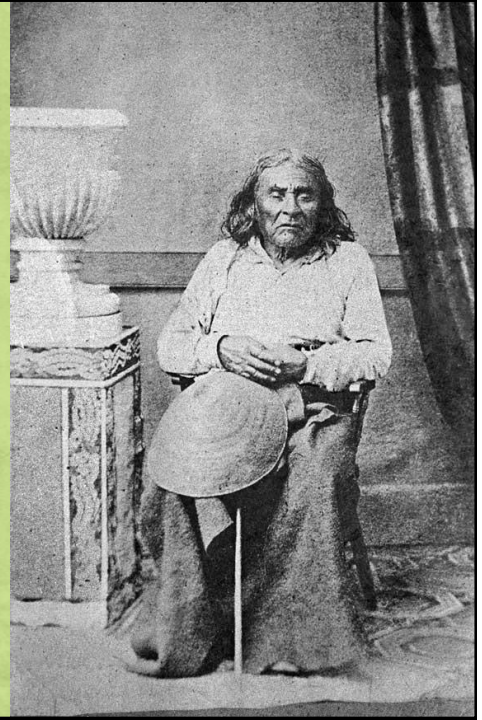


*"If you become conscious of **connections** to **everything**, not just the immediate world before you, you will experience a much broader and more powerful sense of **Being**. Some **Native Americans** talk of being part of the **web of life**. They **connect everything to everything** and so develop a respect for everything as **sacred**.*

*...**Spirituality** leads to **practices** in daily living that reflect a sense of **connectedness** to the world. ..We have to **recover** the sense of **sacredness** of the **world**, even of the **cosmos**, that envelops us.'*

*John Ehrenfeld*

*('Flourishing: A Frank Conversation About Sustainability', 2013. pp. 106-107)*



Bsharre Grove ('Cedars of God'), Lebanon

(Source: iwanderwhy.net)



## Reflection Points:

1. **Spirituality**: promotes outward (transcendent) looking sense of **interconnection**.
2. If the natural world/humanity is treated as **Sacred** – desecration is 'taboo', thus cannot be internalised as an economic externality.
3. However, these are derided by the Western inspired societal **Paradigm of Separation and Reduction** which has driven a **Crisis of Unsustainability** *amid*:
  - globalized standardization;
  - loss of cultural/anthropogenic diversity (including indigenous wisdom/s);
  - techno-optimistic rationality;
  - growth based neo-liberal economic system  
(feeding individualistic consumerism and economic inequality).



## A Dilemma Arises..

Traditional conceptions of the **Sacred/Spirituality** may perhaps be necessary for achieving **authentic Sustainability** (e.g. Ehrenfeld's 'Sustainability as Flourishing').

However, the **dominant Judeo-Christian worldview** has cohered with the dominant societal paradigm which:

- Embraces Cartesian **separation of material and numinous**
- **Anthropocentric** emphasis on (individualistic) **human salvation** and **dominion/control over nature**
- Has pointed toward **heaven ('up there')** and thus away from earth (**metaphysical antagonistic dualism**)
- Guilty of a **proselytizing colonialism**

So, is there any **HOPE** for John Mohawk's '*re-indigenization of the world*', given dominant Western reductionist conceptions of Science and Religion?

## Lynn White's Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis (1967);

10 March 1967, Volume 155, Number 3767

### SCIENCE

#### The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis

Lynn White, Jr.

nating in our own time in the reclama-  
tion of the Zuider Zee. What, if any,  
species of animals, birds, fish, shore  
life, or plants have died out in the  
proc-  
ess  
of the  
ecol-  
ogic  
crisis  
that  
asko  
—

of the past. Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress  
tionship. More science and more tech-as unknown either to Greco-  
nology are not going to get us out of antiquity or to the Orient. It  
the present ecologic crisis until we find in, and is indefensible apart  
a new religion, or rethink our old Judeo-Christian teleology.

one. Zen, however, is as deeply conditioned by Asian history as Christianity is by the experience of the West, and I am dubious of its viability among us.

Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.

The greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history, Saint Francis, proposed what he thought was an alternative Christian view of nature and man's relation to it: he tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation. He failed.

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.

However, just as indigenous cultures can offer rich and diverse understandings and appreciation of our precious world, and a corresponding ethic of **integral interconnection**, neither is this lacking throughout **Western Judeo-Christian** traditions.

**Strong counter-narratives** have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'<sup>1</sup>..

<sup>1</sup> part of definition of indigenous peoples as agreed by the UN  
(with thanks to Gillian Watt, this conference)

## *The Medieval (Pre Modern) World*

**Strong counter-narratives** have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..



*'I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists.'*

Lynn White (1967)

### Canticle of the Creatures (Francis, 1224)

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
especially **Brother Sun**, who is the day and through  
whom you give us light.

...Praised be you, my Lord, through **Sister Moon** and  
the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and  
precious and beautiful.

...Praised be you, my Lord, through our **Sister  
Mother Earth**, who sustains and governs us.

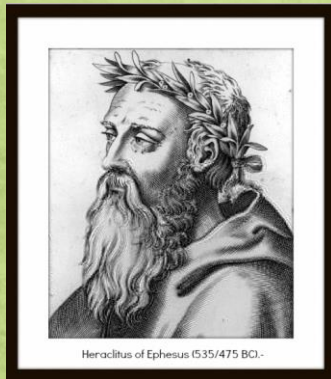
Francis, Patron Saint of Ecology (Pope John Paul II, 1979)



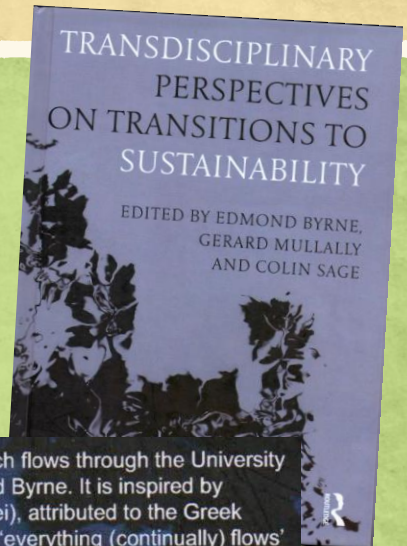
## *The Ancient World*

**Strong counter-narratives** have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..

**Heraclitus; a world of process, continuous change and agonistic complimentary opposites**



*“Men do not know how that which is drawn in different directions harmonises with itself. The **harmonious** structure of the world depends upon **opposite tension** like that of the bow and the lyre.”\**



Cover image: The River Lee which flows through the University College Cork campus. © Edmond Byrne. It is inspired by the caption 'Πάντα ρεῖ' (Panta rhei), attributed to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, meaning 'everything (continually) flows' or, to paraphrase: 'One cannot step into the same river twice.'

\*Heraclitus, Fragment 51, translated by John Burnet (1912)

## *The Early Modern World*

**Strong counter-narratives** have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..

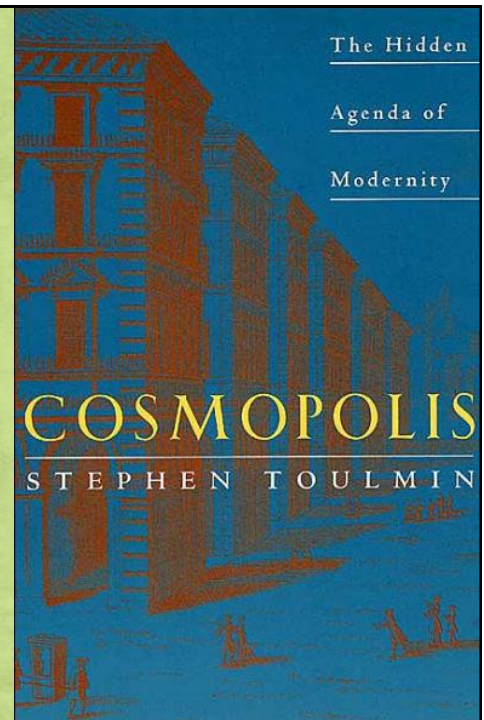


Toulmin (1990) outlines what he calls the '**first phase of Modernity**' (pre 1610) when (a religiously imbued) humanism flourished, tolerant of diversity, plurality and ambiguity, when '*the lack of certainty [was] no error, let alone a sin*' (p.30)



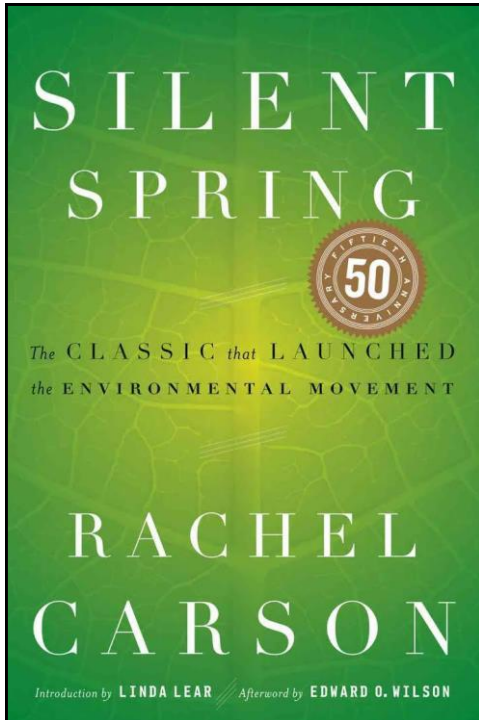

Michel de Montaigne  
(1533-1592);  
*The only thing certain is  
that nothing is certain.*

With the onset of the **second phase of Modernity** however, came a quest for (Cartesian) certainty: 'general axioms were in, concrete diversity was out' (p.34)



## *The Birth of Contemporary Environmentalism*

Strong counter-narratives have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..

**SILENT SPRING**

The CLASSIC that LAUNCHED the ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

**RACHEL CARSON**

Introduction by LINDA LEAR Afterword by EDWARD O. WILSON

*'The history of life on earth has been a history or **interactions** between living things and their surroundings.'*

Rachel Carson,  
*Silent Spring* (1962)

## 'The Religious Humanism of Rachel Carson'

Connie Lasher, *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, 2012, v 22, (193-205)

- Carson; born 1907, of strong **Calvinist** upbringing/background.
- American Calvinism imbued with Puritan-Protestant values but **nature** important, especially cultural significance of '**wilderness**'.
- As American wilderness overtaken by westward expansion/'progress', Self-understanding as '**Nature's nation**' and cultural associations with the **sacred, virtue, beauty, innocence** were **challenged**.
- Carson a product of '**The Nature Study Movement**'; part of progressive focus on education: to impart worldview of **modern science**, while simultaneously nurturing children's **spiritual & ethical development**, while recognizing **limits** of **scientific endeavour**.
- Had support of intellectuals e.g. **John Dewey** (for whom **nature** study was **holistic science**, conveying the full moral import of relational wholeness in personal development).





# *The Contemporary World*

Strong counter-narratives have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..

## Pope Francis: Laudato Si' (2015)

*'Sometimes a book catalyzes thought into action. Uncle Tom's Cabin did this, and so did **Silent Spring**. Like these works, Pope Francis's **Encyclical** is a call to action that insists we embrace the **moral** dimensions of problems that have heretofore been viewed primarily as **scientific, technological, and economic.**'*

Naomi Oreskes

(Prof of History of Science, Harvard U.)

*'Pope Francis's encyclical, **Laudato Si'**, will ultimately be recognised as one of the most significant events in the modern environmental movement.'*

Financial Times, 2 July 2015

## LAUDATO SI'

ON THE CARE OF  
OUR COMMON HOME



## POPE FRANCIS



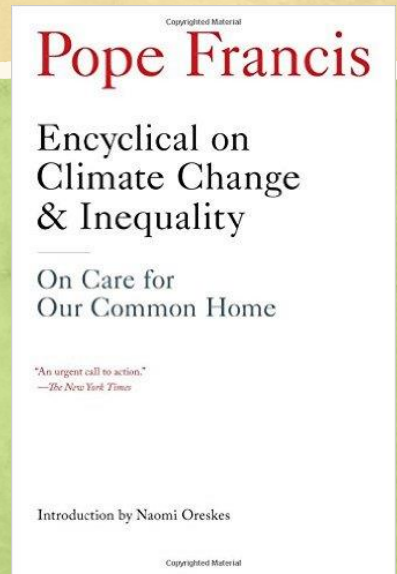
ENCYCLICAL LETTER

## Laudato Si': Franciscan Cartesian critique

*"Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our **common home** is like a **sister** with whom we share our life ..[who] now **cries out** to us because of the **harm** we have inflicted on her ..We have come to see ourselves as her **lords and masters**, entitled to plunder her at will.*

*..[While] we Christians have at times **incorrectly interpreted** the **Scriptures**, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and **given dominion over the earth** justifies **absolute domination over other creatures**.*

*..The poverty and austerity of **Saint Francis** were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more **radical**: a refusal to turn reality into an **object** simply to be used and **controlled**.*



## Laudato Si': Integral Worldview => Interconnection



*"It cannot be emphasized enough how **everything** is **interconnected**. ..It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of **creatures**, but joined in a splendid **universal communion**.*

*..We urgently need a **humanism** capable of **bringing together the different fields of knowledge**, including economics, in the service of a more **integral** and **integrating vision**.*

*..What is needed is a **politics** which is far-sighted and capable of a new, **integral** and **interdisciplinary** approach to handling the different aspects of the **crisis**."*



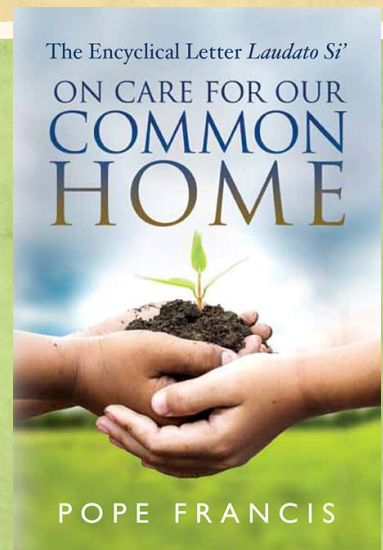


## Laudato Si': Indigenous over Consumerist Values

*"..We need to take up an **ancient** lesson, found in **different religious traditions** and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that '**less is more**'.*

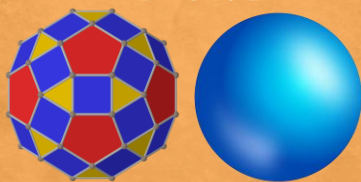
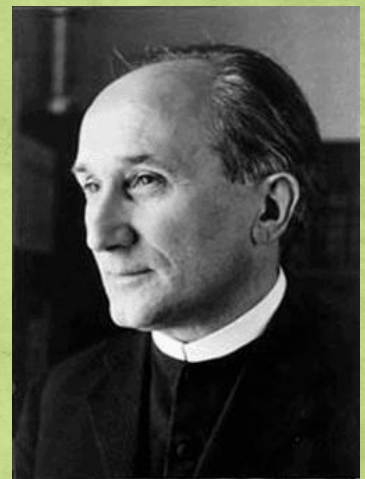
*..A **consumerist vision** of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a **levelling effect on cultures**, diminishing the **immense variety** which is the **heritage** of all **humanity**.*

*..It is essential to show special **care** for **indigenous communities** and their **cultural traditions**. ..For them **land** is not a commodity but ..a **sacred space** with which they need to **interact** if they are to maintain their **identity** and **values**."*



*"The master of oppositions, of **bipolar tensions**, as we might call them, is Guardini, who teaches us this path of **unity in diversity**. What's happening today with fundamentalists? Fundamentalists lock themselves up in their own identity and don't want to hear anything else."*

*..We must not seek **synthesis**, because synthesis can destroy everything; we must tend towards the **polyhedron**, towards the **unity that preserves all diversities, all identities**. The master in this field – because I don't want to commit and act of plagiarism – is **Romano Guardini**"*



### Pope Francis

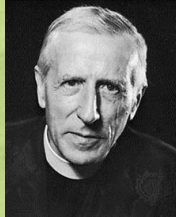
*The Path to Change;  
Thoughts on Politics and Society  
with Dominique Wolton  
(Pan Macmillan, 2018) p.11-12*

Romano Guardini,  
German-Italian Catholic priest,  
academic, philosopher and  
theologian (1885-1968)

## Integral Worldviews from Western/Christian Tradition



**Alfred North Whitehead**  
Philosopher & Mathematician  
(1861-1947)



**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**  
Jesuit Priest & Paleontologist  
(1881-1955)



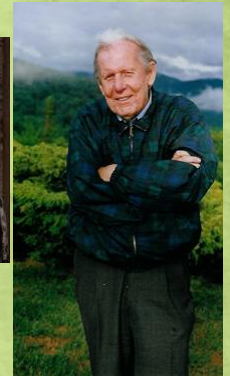
**Ilia Delio**  
Franciscan Sister and Theologian  
(b. 1955)



**John B. Cobb**  
Methodist Theologian and Philosopher  
(b. 1925)



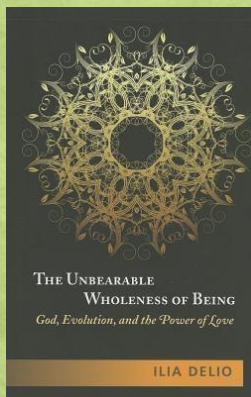
**Catherine Keller**  
Christian Theologian  
(b.1953)



**Thomas Berry**  
Passionist Priest  
(1914-2009)

### Ilia Delio OSF (2007):

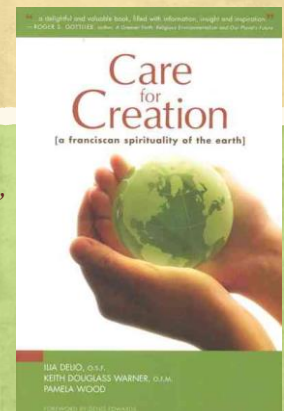
***“Christian responsibility, especially for the natural world, demands that we think of the earth, and the entire cosmos for that matter, as our home.”***



***“We must realize our interconnectedness to creation. A new consciousness must call us to an active stance as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ to the non-human creation. ...Can we recapture a sense of ‘Cosmic family?’”***

***“Sin is the refusal to participate in creation’s web of life. It describes the personal history of one who was created for communion and refuses it. [...We must] realize that sinful actions are at the root of our present ecological crisis and thus our need for ongoing penance or conversion.”***

\*Ilia Delio, Franciscan sister, theologian (U. Villanova)





# *The Contemporary Scientific World*

Strong counter-narratives have always existed  
'*distinct from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live*'..

Contemporary Science: An emerging Integrative '**Complexity**'  
Paradigm (challenging 'Reduction and Separation')



**Creativity** in natural **complex** systems is a property,  
“so stunning, so overwhelming, so worthy of **awe**, **gratitude**, and **respect**,  
that it is **God enough** for many of us.”

Stuart Kauffman  
Biologist, Complexity Scientist  
Reinventing the Sacred (2008), p.276.

# *The Local Indigenous World*

Strong counter-narratives have always existed  
'*distinct* from those of the **dominant societies** in which they live'..



Nano Nagle  
(1718 – 1784)

 nano nagle birthplace  
heritage spirituality ecology





# nano nagle birthplace

heritage spirituality ecology

Special days of Inspiration, Wisdom and Reflection

## July 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2018 Save the Date


Special days of Inspiration, Wisdom and Reflection

Celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday of Nano Nagle with us in her birthplace from July 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2018.

### 12 July Sharon Zayac OP Evolutionary Awareness: An Emerging Worldview

We are in the midst of a cosmic shift in understanding who we are as persons, as people of faith, and as a human species. What is this newly emerging consciousness? What does it teach us about who we are, how we are related to the whole, and how we image Holy Mystery? Using The Cosmic Story as our context, we find inspiration and hope as we explore and reflect upon its deeper meaning. For reflection and discovery, this session will have personal contemplative time.


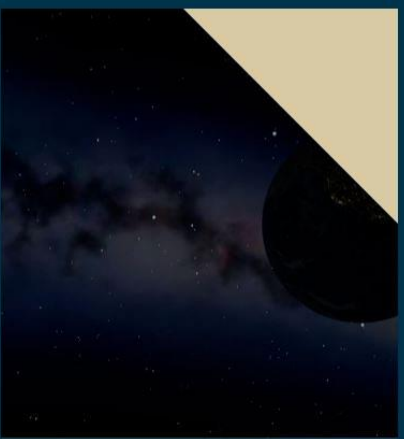
**Speaker: Sr. Sharon Zayac** – a Dominican Sister in Springfield, Illinois – is Director of Jubilee Farm, her congregation's 164-acre centre for ecology and spirituality located near Springfield, Illinois. A writer and lecturer, she speaks on many ecological topics, but her passion is sharing the Universe Story and its implications for life and faith. Her book – *Earth Spirituality: In the Catholic and Dominican Traditions* – focuses on evolutionary consciousness as an emerging worldview.



# Nano Nagle Place


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Discover Community Visit What's on

### The Story of Our Universe


30.01.18-27.02.18, 19.30-20.30



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## The Cosmic Walk



The Cosmic Walk is a reflection using the image of a spiral to understand the order of our Universe, a Universe that is still evolving. After the Beginning or the Great Flaring Forth comes. Scientists now know that there are about a hundred thousand million galaxies in the universe. Learn about the birth of Planet Earth and much more. An evening of Awe!


Every Tuesday evening starting November 23, ending November 29  
7:30 - 21:00  
Nano Nagle Place, (entrance through Evergreen Street)  
**Registration is required:** email: [Info@nanonagleplace.ie](mailto:Info@nanonagleplace.ie) or telephone 021-419-3580  
For: Sister Emma Rooney



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## Journey of the Universe



The Journey of the Universe is a film that presents the epic story of the Cosmos, Earth and Human transformation. This work is written by Brian Swimme and Evelyn Tucker. It is based on modern scientific knowledge and spiritual reflection.

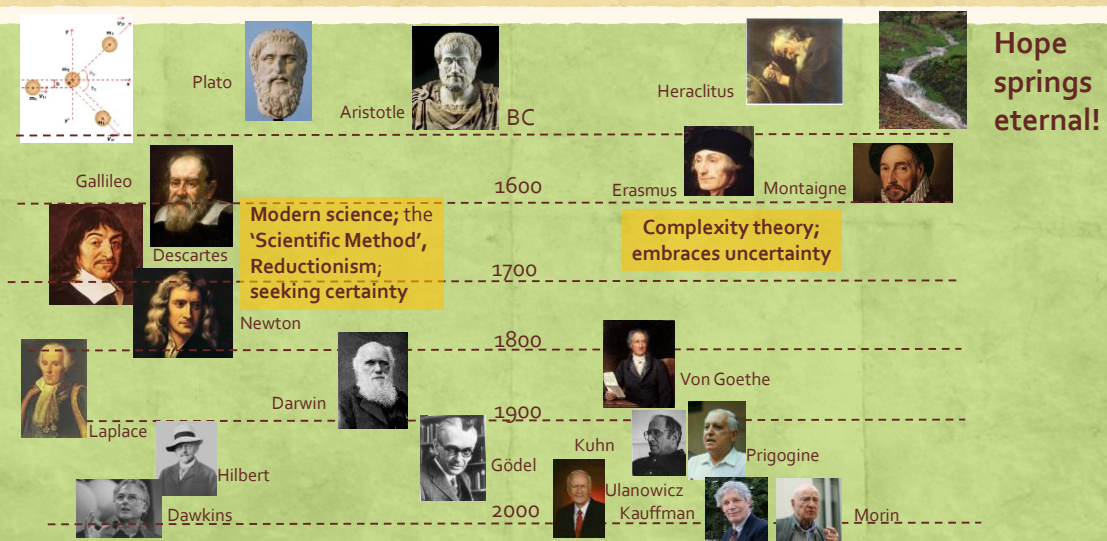
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For: Sister Emma Rooney  
*Seating is not available*



	Seeks certainty/control	Recognises inherent Uncertainty
<b>Materialistic</b>	<b>Modern (Reductionist)</b> <b>Associated with:</b> Reductionist 'Science'; 'Value free' logic/rationality Technocratic techno-optimism Seeks revealed certainty through reason <b>Progress through:</b> Reductionist Science	<b>(Deconstructivist) Postmodern</b> <b>Associated with:</b> Deconstructivism, Scepticism Constant decentred change (in space and time) Ineliminable Uncertainty, Nihilism <b>Progress through:</b> Pluralistic Tolerance
<b>Beyond materialism</b> (spiritual, transcendent, emergent)	<b>Premodern (Traditional)</b> <b>Associated with:</b> Singular, comprehensive view of universe Fixed hierarchical structure Irreducible mystery, Sacred <b>Progress through:</b> Interpretations & Insights into the Unique, Divine Created Order through mediated Scripture/Sacred texts	<b>Integrative (Interconnection)</b> <b>Associated with:</b> Transdisciplinarity, Irreducible complexity; normativity (/values), Interconnectedness, recursivity Process change and emergent evolution <b>Progress through:</b> Integrative Science and Philosophy; Progress recognised as contingent, context dependent, emergent and qualitative ('sustainability as flourishing')

Based on Byrne (2017), drawn from Hedlund-de Witt's Integrative Worldview Framework

## (throughout) Western Science & Philosophy; ..persistence of Integrative (Indigenous) Cosmologies



# Traditional and Contemporary Eco-Cosmologies within Western and Christian Indigenous Traditions;

*Seeking Sustainability through recognition of Integral Interconnection*



Eco-cosmology, Sustainability and a Spirit of Resilience Conference,  
University College Cork, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018

**Edmond Byrne**

School of Engineering /  
*Sustainability in Society* Research Group