

**“THE GREAT CONFERENCE AT CLAREMONT”  
RE-IMAGINING CIVILIZATION AS ECOLOGICAL**

**By Herman F. Greene**

*This report on the “Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization Conference” held at Pomona College, Claremont, California, June 4-7, 2015, has four parts: (1) “The Story,” (2) What the Participants Said,” (3) “A Critical Review,” and (4) “The Outcome.”*



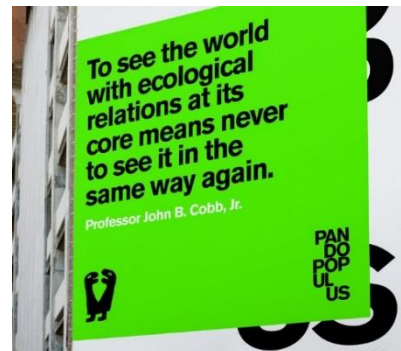
*Something great happened in Claremont, so the first task is to tell the story.*

## THE STORY



While many stood out at the conference, one person could not be missed—John B Cobb, Jr. At plenaries in Bridges Auditorium, he sat near the back most of the time with no apparent responsibilities. Yet inwardly, he must have been aflame. For all the 90 years of his life, he had prepared for this. Probably no one else could have pulled this off, certainly not this particular conference. Directly and indirectly he brought together his amazing network to re-imagine civilization as ecological—2,000 participants in all, 200 from China, 1,800 at the opening plenary, 900 presenters, 85 Tracks.

Let this conference—“Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization,” the 10<sup>th</sup> International Whitehead Conference, held at Pomona College, Claremont, California, June 4-7, 2015—be known as “**THE GREAT CONFERENCE AT CLAREMONT**” or simply “**The Great Conference.**” Never before had such an assemblage been held. John Cobb was the originator, the architect (with help from others such as Vern Visick, Andrew Schwartz and Ignacio Castuera), the guide, the teacher, the sage, and the magnet who drew us together. As unassuming and inconspicuous as he would otherwise want to be, his presence was everywhere at the Great Conference. If he is remembered for one thing, he will be remembered for this. This was his capstone achievement. For the world it, very possibly, was a new beginning.



Let me explain.

One could not help but be excited as the time for the Great Conference neared, especially as registration swelled. Pando Populus (more about Pando Populus below) issued this invitation:

**Some 1,000 presenters from more than 30 countries and 80 fields of specialty and are coming together for the most ambitious trans-disciplinary event ever held on behalf of the planet: “Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization.” June 4-7, 2015 Claremont, CA The conference is for everyone who cares about the big ideas that matter for a thriving biosphere.**

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This invitation was so enticing, no, so important, that people who normally would come to conferences only as keynoters came just to participate in one of 85 Tracks. Rosemary Radford Reuther—What is Civilization and What Are its Consequences for Human Relations to the Rest of the Natural World?; Mark Analeski, Joshua Farley, David Korten—Ecological Economics; Stuart Kauffman--Systems Theory, Complexity Theory, and Radical Emergence; Brian Swimme, Becca Tarnas, Richard Tarnas—Late

Modernity and Its Re-Imaging; Larry Rasmussen—Eco-Feminism; Ellen Brown—Political Collapse; Fubin Yang—Birth Pangs of Ecological civilization; Sally Bingham, Fletcher Harper-Reimagining and Mobilizing Religious Traditions in Response to the Eco-Crisis; Michael Lerner—The Jewish Contribution to Ecological Civilization; Stanislov Grof, John Grimm, Robert McDermott—Extraordinary Challenges to the Modern Paradigm; Mary Evelyn Tucker, Richard Norgaard, Carl Anthony, Paloma Pavel—Journey of the Universe and inclusive History as a Context of Meaning; Tripp Fuller, Brian McLaren—A New Way for a New Day; Spyridon Koutroufinis, Terrence Deacon—Unprecedented Evolution: Human Continuities and Discontinuities with Animal Life; Laura Underkuffler, Mary Christina Wood—Law, Legal Theory and Law Practice . . . and these are just a few taken from the 64-page conference program.

A large number of people from the Whiteheadian community, young and old, well-known and not so well known, published and unpublished, students, professors, various other professions and endeavors, people familiar to readers of *Process Perspectives* know, were also present. Also present and providing leadership were residents of Pilgrim Place, many of them “re-fired” missionaries, ministers, professors of religion, and of other distinguished professions and pursuits with long years of global experience and wisdom.

The keynoters, each contributing to the conference, were noteworthy—Bill McKibben, Vandana Shiva, Sheri Lao, John Cobb, Herman Daly, Wes Jackson, and David Ray Griffin. Many were responsive to the urgent messages of McKibben and Shiva. People were fascinated by the work of Wes Jackson on perennial wheat and how one could contribute to changing the very nature of agriculture if one devoted one’s life to it. Sheri Lao who works with dozens of eco-villages in rural China was another living demonstration of hope. John Cobb and Herman Daly, who co-authored *For the Common Good* in 1989 (perhaps, along with Thomas Berry’s *Dream of the Earth*, published in 1988, the seminal works behind this conference) spoke gravely about our present situation and the work ahead. We listened and took this in.



There is much to be reported about the gracious setting at Pomona College and Pitzer College. The cavernous Frary Dining Hall, filled three times a day echoed with pleasantries and vigorous debate. Bridges Auditorium provided a commodious, solemn setting for the plenaries. The Pilgrim Pickers and singers set a tone for each convocation. Musicians played in Marston Quadrangle each day and was a place of gathering at the end of the day each evening and Smith Campus Center provided amenities and another gathering place for participants. The final banquet was elegant, though suitably simple (vegan) for a conference on ecological civilization.



It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that the heart of the conference, the purpose of the conference, the meaning of the conference, and the outcome of the conference all was planned around, focused on, depended upon and occurred in the “Tracks.”

Two years preceding the conference, John Cobb wrote a 50-page proposal stating the purpose of the conference and outline multiple Sections and Tracks—in the end there were 12 Sections and within them 85 Tracks. As to the purpose he wrote:

June 4-7, 2015, we will hold in Claremont the tenth in the series of International Whitehead Conferences sponsored by the International Process Network (from this point on identified as 10<sup>th</sup> IWC). In the 10<sup>th</sup> IWC we plan to build on the work of previous conferences and on the widespread cultural changes that are already expressing an ecological sensibility. We are responding especially to the growing sense of urgency, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the deepening awareness that the changes must be radical, that is, go to the roots of what has led to the current threat of catastrophe. Some of these roots go even deeper than the assumptions of the modern age into the rise of civilization itself. The current interest in indigenous cultures expresses a profound insight.

The “we” who are planning this conference belong to a group of thinkers who have long believed that Alfred North Whitehead provides the best alternative to the Cartesian and Kantian views of the world, which ground and pervade modernity. We have been working in many fields, often encountering others who share most of our concerns and insights. We do not, however, know of any other thinker who offers a vision as comprehensive and rigorous as Whitehead’s. In his philosophy we find a conceptuality that can ground and unify the creative and promising work that others are already doing. We believe that Whitehead offers not just *an* alternative to the modern organization of thought and life, but the most promising one. We invite those who know that the transformation and survival of civilization require *an* alternative to join us in considering *this* alternative.

He invited people to lead the various Sections and Tracks and to invite people to participate in their Tracks. For example, Howard Vogel, Mark Modak-Truran and I were asked to lead the law Track which ultimately was called the “Law, Legal Theory, and Law Practice” Track. We (and other Track leaders) were asked to organize eight 90-minute sessions. Thus in a conference of four days—really three because the first day was only a single plenary—we were given 12 hours for our Track sessions. The clear instruction was to begin something, not end something at the Great Conference.

Again as an example of how a Track was structured, the sessions of the Law Track were:

1. Flight from Normative Concern and Its Consequences for the Study and Practice of Law
2. Process Thought and Legal Theory
3. The Rights of Nature
4. How Protection of the Environment Requires Rethinking the Idea of Property
5. Legal Pluralism in a Globalized World: Re-imagining Dispute Systems as Relational Worldmaking Practices
6. Franklin I. Gamwell's Process Political Theory and Constitutional Law
7. Earth Jurisprudence
8. “Seizing an Alternative” in Legal Theory and Legal Practice: Next steps?

There were 12 presenters in our Track and around 25 participants. Three presenters had planned to attend and could not, one was present via the Internet. I think this was typical of the Tracks though some were larger and some were smaller. Some of the intended Tracks were canceled or merged with other Tracks. I mention this to highlight, that although well-planned, the improvised and impromptu nature of this unprecedented conference.

AND THIS WAS JUST ONE OF 85 TRACKS!

Every goal John Cobb and the other organizers set for this conference was met. They planned for

- 1,500 participants—there were 2,000. Note that the largest conference ever held by the Whitehead community previously, the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Whitehead Conference held in Claremont in 1998, had 450 participants.
- 80 Tracks—there were 85.
- 800 presenters—there were 900.

The Center for Process Studies and the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, both in Claremont, have for more than a dozen years had close relations with the Peoples Republic of China. There are now 25 process-related university centers in China. The concept of ecological civilization came independently from China and is official state policy. CPS, IPDC and the various centers in China have held five prior conferences on ecological civilization, some in Claremont some in China. Prior ecological civilization conferences in Claremont have had as many as 125 participants from China and other countries, but never have 200 people come from China to Claremont—a tremendous feat considering visa issues. Likely no nation will have a greater influence on the 21<sup>st</sup> century—on the prospects for a truly ecological civilization, than China. It is of tremendous significance that process-relational thought has become an important source of constructively post-modern thought in China. This conference furthered this connection and influence.

To some degree the same can be said of the other nations and regions of the world, process-relational thought has become a global phenomenon.

Which leaves two things to be said in this report:

- That this conference was unlike any other International Whitehead Conference or any other conference originated by Whiteheadians—the invitation was not to participate in a conference on Whitehead and other process-relational philosophies, the invitation was to apply process-relational knowing, doing and being to the crisis of late modernity for the purpose of shaping a new civilizational order. Hence “non-Whiteheadians” were drawn to this conference in large numbers. The common bonds were shared senses of the fundamental evolutionary and ecological nature of the universe, the fundamental failure of the current globalized civilization, and the fundamental framework of process-relational understandings as the basis for re-imagining and realizing a “civilization” for the entire community of life—an ecological civilization; and
- That the meaning of the conference is best told in the words of the participants in the conference, which follows.

#### WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAID



After the conference ended, the organizers invited participants to comment on the conference. Here are some of the comments.

##### **David Lewit, Section I, Track 5, “A New Economic System”**

On the plenary level, Wes Jackson’s perennial grains blew me away!

There’s plenty of follow-up work for my Track. Presently I am reviewing 12 hours of symposium video and transcripts looking not just for surprises, but mainly for institutions of the future which could form the nexus of a better socio-economic system. I will be reconnecting with symposium participants for their versions. Joint papers and targeted video shows could emerge.

##### **Chris Chapple, Section IX, Track 5, “Mystical Disciplines, Ritual, and Worship”**

Stan Grof, a pioneer in breath-based consciousness work, shared amazing tales! In our working group on mysticism and ritual, Stan Grof was delightful. His thoughtful material underscored the historical significance of the worldview shift that came in the 1950s

and 1960s with various experiments with altered mind states, including the development of breathing techniques to facilitate conscious awakening.

**David J. Lull, Section VI, Track 10, “Reading the Bible for the Sake of the World”**

The “salvation” of the planet is one possible consequence of human salvation. However, the Bible begins and ends with stories of God’s restoration of the land’s fertility, the rehydration and reforestation of the land. God’s salvation of the planet—the landscape and waterscapes, and all living things on the land, in the water, and in the air—is a constant theme from Genesis 1-11 to the Book of Revelation. These biblical stories provide a vision of “ecological civilization,” built on eco-friendly agriculture and economics (e.g., Shabbat/Sabbath/Jubilee) and communitarian economics (e.g., in the earliest Jesus traditions).

**Heather Eaton, Section IX, Track 6, “Eco-Feminism”**

Our group was very active and interesting. Honestly, the group worked very hard and I feel we accomplished movement in our thought and work. The participants wrote to me afterwards saying how much they appreciated the dialogue and focus we maintained.

**Ward McAfee, Section III, Track 2 “How the Enlightenment and Industrialization Reshape Our Relationship to Nature” (Bi-lingual, Mandarin and English)**

Over three days we wrestled with our Section’s focus on “Humans versus Nature.” Throughout our discussions, we sought to discern the time period when human beings became alienated from Nature. We admired the ancient wisdom of China for its ecological sensibilities, seeing human beings as a small part of Nature rather than as dominators of Earth. The Judeo-Christian tradition was faulted for its anthropocentrism and strong tendency to portray humans as God’s chosen “stewards” of the earth (which has easily slipped into being self-presumed masters of the earth). The Enlightenment was faulted for Cartesian dualism, encouraging a mentality separating the (human) mind from matter with its tendency to objectify Nature rather than adoring it as our sustaining “Mother.” There was also great recognition of the good that came from the Enlightenment--a heightened sense of the dignity of the individual and the benefits of democratic participation in decision-making. From the outset, our Track focused on the desirability of a Second Enlightenment combining the best to be found in both modern thought and pre-modern thought. All of our discussions concerned the interconnected dysfunctions of modern economic practices.

**Margaret Stout, Section X, Track 3, “Governance and Public Administration”**

While two Tracks focused on indigenous and African traditions, I felt that the conference could have been inverted in terms of focus. In other words, what do these perspectives have to teach process philosophy and theology? Most of us deliberated on what process philosophy can bring to a variety of disciplines and practices. However, aspects of process philosophy and theology carry forward Modern/Western/Global North concepts, although it is the best of those offerings. How can these ancient wisdoms help us identify and eliminate those particular aspects that are in large part invisible to those from that culture?

Our Track is working as a group on a shared research agenda and have identified a number of research questions which we will pursue in various combinations both for anticipated manuscripts and a

representative set of conferences in our field to make a concerted effort at disseminating process thought broadly among U.S., European, and South American audiences.

**Matthew David Segall, Section III, Track 3 “Late Modernity and its Re-Imaging”**

I can share the sense of hope with which I left the conference. In the short term, everyone I spoke with or heard present was realistic about the catastrophe we are facing. But the creativity and tenacity of the conference participants gave me hope for the longer term. Even if it is born out of the ashes of a doomed industrial civilization, I believe a future ecological civilization is all but inevitable.

Moving forward, I am working with participants in my Track to create a publishable collection of essay related to our Track theme. Many unexpected overlaps emerged over the course of the weekend, including new spiritual forms, critiques of the dominant economic system, and appreciation for epistemological and even ontological pluralism.

And of course, a big thank you to John Cobb and the whole Claremont team for putting on such a huge, well-organized, and courageous conference. It was unlike anything I've ever experienced.

**Kevin O'Brien, Section I, Track 2, “The Technological Response: Geo-Engineering”**

One thing worth mentioning is that our Track is producing an edited volume of the papers presented, discussed, and critiqued at the conference. We have a contract with Lexington books, and hope that *Calming the Storm: Theological and Ethical Perspectives on Climate Engineering* will be out by late 2016.

**René Pikarski, Section IV, Track 6, “Unprecedented Evolution: Human Continuities with Animas Life”**

Certainly, there have been plenty of memorable experiences considering the tight four days of the conference. I would like to compare the memorability with my most profound impression: the comprehensive activist mood, the spirit of optimism that surrounded like a veil the variety of interesting Tracks. As a European I noted that there are many conferences where people just speak about sustainability and an ecological society. But here in Claremont, people attended who not only have already realized and worked on actual projects but they also have concrete and purposeful imaginations and thoughts connected to their visions. For me, this concreteness under the aegis of a general vision—a future perspective towards a new society—is an expression of an interdisciplinary conference that has chosen a philosophical focal point or a motto as well as the ideas connected with Alfred North Whitehead. This is indeed a sincere, beautiful and probably the most valuable understanding of the notion of process.

It is not possible to choose a special person from all the magnificent minds at the conference. Due to the fact that I spent most of the time and had the most intensive contact with the members of our Track, it was especially this creative team, composed of Spyridon Koutroufinis, Terrence Deacon, July Hui, Matthew David Segall, Linda Groff, Sean MacCracken, and Andrew Beath who initiated new paths of thought. Furthermore, the conversations with and talks of our Section leader, Philip Clayton, were inspiring by giving new directions and useful constraints to some of my disconnected thoughts.

**John Buchanan, Section IX, Track 4, “Extraordinary Challenges to the Modern Paradigm”**

Chris Aanstoos and I are working on putting together an edited collection of essays from my Track.



## **Xiaoting Liu, Section V, Track 2, “China and Ecological Civilization” (Mandarin only)**

Generally, this conference belongs to the highest level. I was moved and touched by so many speeches. Firstly, the speeches given by Dr. John Cobb, Dr. David Ray Griffin, Dr. Zhihe Wang, and Dr. Vandana Shiva surprised me most. The lecture about the agriculture by Dr. Wes Jackson was very profound and encouraging. The lecture given by Dr. Zhihe Wang on the root of the culture was very enlightening.

Secondly, it is worth noting that many Chinese scholars attended this conference. This means that the developing China has realized some problems and has found a starting point to act.

Thirdly, the vision of Pando Populus shocked me deeply. We held the first Pando-Forum on July 14, 2014, at China University of Political Science and Law. The purpose of the Pando-Forum is to spread the spirit of Pando. Dr. Philip Clayton was present at this meeting from beginning to end.

Last but not least, this conference emphasized the importance of action, union, and hope. These factors can make us join together so that we come out from the disappointed mood. It is worth mentioning that the Band of Angels gave us a memorable memory. They are great!

Going forward, we will continue to deepen the thoughts of this conference. From October 31-November 3, 2015, we will hold the 10th International Seminar on Biocosmology at Beijing Normal University, titled “Contemporary Issues and Biocosmological Perspectives for the Development of Asian Naturalism,” <http://en.biocosmology.ru/>. By holding this international seminar, we hope to obtain some new perspectives about the Process Philosophy.

We will also set up ecological civilization of Beijing think-tank. Further, we plan to publish a series of papers and books so that the thoughts we obtained few weeks ago during the conference can be known by more and more people. And we welcome more and more scholars join us.

China is not only a huge developing country, but also an awakened country which has realized the urgency to build the ecological civilization. It is China who has the most lasting tradition. Now, China is devoting itself to a great practice, of which a small event may influence the whole world. Therefore, Chinese scholars would feel happy to fight for the future of human beings together with other scholars from all over the world. And we wish more and more Western scholars pay more attention to China.

### **A CRITICAL REVIEW**

None of us who attended the Great Conference had experience, to any great degree, in changing civilization. Many of us had seen in our lifetime the emergence of a globalized Western civilization, but this was the culmination of the change to modern civilization which began some 500 years ago. Thinking about civilizational change with no personal frame of reference other than accounts in history books is difficult.

Change, simply change, has become so rapid that one might wonder if we could ever again demarcate a clear point of civilizational transition. I would, however, venture based on the frame set by John Cobb, the titles of the Sections, the character of the plenary and Section addresses and conversations with participants, that what brought us together was the sense that the current globalized industrial civilization is in its terminal phase and civilizational change is either occurring or is desperately needed.

What do we mean when we talk of “civilization” or “a civilization”? Some commentators look to political alliances or empires to identify civilizations, others to technology and economics. These are important, but the most profound understandings of civilizations are based on culture. To go to the root or source



of a civilization, one must go to culture, the aspect that is the most difficult and takes the longest time to change. Samuel Huntington gives these helpful definitions of civilizations based on culture: “A civilization is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity.”<sup>1</sup> A civilization involves “the ‘values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance.’”<sup>2</sup> A civilization is “comprehensive [,which is to say] none of the constituent units can be fully understood without reference to the encompassing civilization.”<sup>3</sup> And he argues that “religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations.”<sup>4</sup>

Philosophy, the dominant way of seeing and understanding the world and an aspect of culture, is also a core element of a civilization. Philosophy may be of primary importance in bringing about civilizational

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 41, quoting Adda B. Bozeman, “Civilizations under Stress,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51 (Winter 1975).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 47.

change. E. Maynard Adams offers three historical examples of how changes in philosophy functioned to bring about cultural reformation leading to civilizational change:

[(1)] The Greek enlightenment from the sixth to the fourth century B.C.E., [(2)] the development of Christian feudalism in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire and its supporting culture, and [(3)] the dissolution of Christian feudalism and the emergence of modern Western civilization from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In each of these periods, philosophers exposed cultural errors in the dying civilization and helped construct and defend a new vision of humankind and the world and a culture that would support, and generate social institutions that would support, the new way of life.<sup>5</sup>

A premise of the Great Conference was that Whiteheadian thought, or at least process-relational philosophies in general, would be important at this level of magnitude in bringing into being ecological civilization.

The conference organizers made four fundamental strategic decisions in planning the conference:

1. The concept “ecological civilization” was sufficient to unify the conference and define its purpose.
2. The conference would be organized around Tracks and participants for the most part would be in a single Track;
3. The conference could be used as a platform to spread the influence of Whiteheadian thought; and, as a corollary, the conference could bring together Whiteheadians and non-Whiteheadians who had process-relational worldviews in a fruitful way while still giving priority to Whitehead; and



4. China could be held up as the originator of ecological civilization and the society most committed to its realization.

The implicit criterion for success of the conference could not have been higher: To be successful the conference needed to make significant difference, for humankind as a whole, in “seizing the alternative of ecological civilization.” It was to do this by bringing together a body of scholars (whether professional academics or not) to begin, in a new way, a disciplined and continuing effort to re-think or re-imagine civilization for the purpose of creating, enhancing and guiding the needed planetary action for constructive civilizational change.

Against this criterion, I am unable to judge its success with any degree of certainty. Yet, in calling it the Great Conference at Claremont I have already made a decision that history may judge this conference a success in this way. Just as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Luther, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, and Smith were important to the rise of modern industrial civilization, those present at the Great Conference may

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 360.

be recognized as having been important to the rise of ecological civilization . . . except in this transition, it will be different. For this transition is greater—it is planetary, it involves all humans, human societies and future generations, and all animals, plants, and ecosystems, and all powers of Earth and universe. Those who bring about this transition, if it occurs, will be legion. A certain non-egoistic, anonymity will be required of those who will lead. These characteristics, I will add, are already built in to the life of the Whiteheadian community beginning with Whitehead who had all of his personal papers burned. The *ideas* and the *actions* coming out of the conference—these are what matter the most.

Each of the strategic decisions made by the organizers caused difficulties. The one most commented on, a source of aggravation for many, was the decision to organize the conference by Tracks. The conference was a conference of many separate conferences. The plenaries, with the exception of John Cobb's presentation, were not set up to provide organizational unity to the conference. Each Track was self-organizing within the general framework set or encouraged by John Cobb for the conference and each Track.

One potential participant decided not to come. She objected that this conference, while held up as an example of trans- or interdisciplinary work, was composed of disciplines in silos. Many who did attend said they wished they could have attended presentations in more than one Track. Some did cross Tracks and in doing so caused some difficulties for the Track leaders and participants while also enriching the Tracks.

The strategic decision to bring together Whiteheadians and non-Whiteheadians while still giving priority to Whitehead was welcomed and tolerated by, and a source of some frustration for, participants. Was this combination a temporary phenomenon good for this one conference, or will a broadened process community continue joined by work on ecological civilization and process-relational worldviews? If so, will this broadened process community hold together if some give priority to Whitehead, some to Teilhard, some to Bergson, and some to ideas originating from thinkers and communities outside "process" frameworks? Is Whitehead necessary for this continuing work and must Whitehead be given priority? These are very critical questions.

Let's go back to the words John Cobb wrote in the long document that was the basis for planning the conference (with emphases added):

The "we" who are planning this conference belong to a group of thinkers who have long believed that **Alfred North Whitehead provides the best alternative** to the Cartesian and Kantian views of the world, which ground and pervade modernity. . . . In his philosophy we find a conceptuality that can ground and unify the creative and promising work that others are already doing. We believe that Whitehead offers not just *an* alternative to the modern organization of thought and life, but the most promising one. We invite those who know that the transformation and survival of civilization require *an* alternative to join us in considering **this alternative**.

The name of the conference was "Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization," non-Whiteheadians may well have thought "this alternative" that they were to consider was ecological civilization, not Whitehead.

Later in the planning document John Cobb even more clearly stated that Whitehead was the alternative to be considered:

Our conference will largely be devoted to displaying the Whiteheadian alternative. It will show that members of the Whiteheadian family have already pioneered in significant ways and that the Whiteheadian alternative is sufficiently advanced across the range of human concerns to provide the shared vision so urgently needed. We invite those who know that we need to think in more organic, relational, integrated, nondual, and processive ways to find a home in the Whiteheadian community. We need a great deal of help in working out and implementing this alternative vision.

To join the Whiteheadian family does not mean to agree with Whitehead in every detail. That would be impossible. Whitehead's philosophy was "in process" throughout his life. His followers continue that process of change and development – and they do so in diverse directions. We argue intensely with one another. There is no Whiteheadian orthodoxy to which one must subscribe.

But as a group we are deeply convinced that Whitehead builds on the most remarkable findings of recent science to show us a positive way to deal with a wide range of questions, including scientific ones.

Only occasionally during the actual conference did this aim of having participants as a whole consider the Whiteheadian alternative explicitly become manifest, most notably it did during John Cobb's and David Ray Griffin's plenary addresses.

Some of the participants in the conference, though realizing they had come to a Whitehead conference, found the intrusion of Whitehead into topics, such as climate change that were otherwise of interest to Whiteheadians and non-Whiteheadians, uncomfortable. While there was definitely greater exposure of the non-Whiteheadians present at the conference to Whitehead, it is unclear whether many considered "the Whiteheadian alternative."

I did not hear comment on the strategic decision to give special consideration to China as the originator and, to a certain degree, exemplar of ecological civilization. A whole paper could be written on this decision. For participants generally it was understandable that, since China provided the largest non-US delegation, the Chinese would receive special attention. For those who understand recent development of the Whiteheadian community the reasons for the attention were, however, much deeper and more complex. The influence of Whitehead in China has spread more extensively and rapidly than in any other country in recent years. There are more than two dozen university centers in China related to process thought. The Center for Process Studies and the Institute for Post-Modern Development of China, both based in Claremont, have extensive relations with Chinese academics and also with government and Communist Party officials. This conference itself was one in an annual series in Claremont of ecological civilization conferences with the Chinese, and Whiteheadians have also participated in ecological civilization conferences in China.

China is the originator of the concept of ecological civilization and it is the only state that has made ecological civilization a goal. It has taken many steps to increase renewable energy, restore forests, and reduce pollution. Yet it is also the world's top producer of greenhouse gases and its greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly increasing. It has many environmental problems or crises. The conduct of its

government is not without controversy. These awarenesses must have been in the back of the mind of participants of the conference even if they were not spoken.

The strategic decision to make “ecological civilization” the focus of the conference was the most important one. But did it unify the conference and define its purpose? The term itself was not defined, it was an attractor to be defined by participants in their own ways. Civilization change as compared with societal or institutional reform was not defined either. One Section of the conference explicitly dealt with “The Threatening Catastrophe: Responding Now.” The other 11 Sections involved areas requiring long-term change. There was no negative comment on this strategic decision, this was the primary concept that brought people to this conference.

So did the conference succeed in view of these strategic decisions . . . or in spite of them?

As a single conference, it was a grand success. This is reflected in “What the Participants Said,” as given above. It is also reflected by the breadth of participation in the conference and the topics covered. As stated above, it met and exceeded every goal set by the conference organizers. It was a great conference.

But was it “The Great Conference”? This would have to be measured by the implicit criterion that to be successful the conference needed to make significant difference, for humankind as a whole, in “seizing the alternative of ecological civilization. This depends to a considerable extent on the “Outcome,” or follow up, discussed in the next section of this report. It also depends on the strategies made by the conference organizers (being recast as follows) holding up:

1. The concept “ecological civilization” can unify and define the purpose of a global movement for global civilization change;
2. Scholars (both provisional academics and others) need to continue to re-think and re-imagine civilization by disciplined and coordinated work on the Track topics and on other topics to be named and pursued;
3. Advancing process-relational worldviews and ways of acting and being are important to the realization of ecological civilization and Whiteheadian thought has a particularly important role to play;
4. The Global South and indigenous people have important roles to play in bringing ecological civilization into being and China has a particularly important role to play; and
5. Bringing into being ecological civilization involves immediate efforts to mitigate catastrophic social and ecological change and long-term efforts to build cultures of justice and peace in harmony with nature.

The outcome is not assured. Bringing into being ecological civilization is the most complex and difficult ask ever presented to humankind and faces many challenges. Once arrived at, it must be continually re-created. Ecological civilization is a process concept.

## **THE OUTCOME**

Now that the Great Conference has ended and we have scattered, what does it mean for us to seize the alternative of ecological civilization? I will report on various structures and efforts for follow up within

the process community and then place our efforts in the context of what is happening in the global sustainability movement.



I will begin by again revisiting the fundamental strategic decisions made in planning the conference and use them to frame issues related to follow up;

1. Having been presented with the alternative of ecological civilization, will we take up the challenge of bringing it into being? Will Whiteheadians accept that seeing the world with ecological relations at the core is inherently Whiteheadian? In my Track a participant said that we had “two” Tracks: one involved of efforts to apply Whiteheadian concepts to law and the other concerned how could better address ecological issues. There has long been tensions between those in the process community who wish to take a purely “academic” approach to process philosophy and those who have felt process thought involves social commitments to be acted upon. Will Whiteheadians unite around ecological civilization? With reference to the wider community that includes non-Whiteheadians can the concept “ecological civilization” unify and define the purpose of a global movement for civilization change?
2. Will participants in the conference commit to disciplined efforts sustained over many years to re-think and re-imagine civilization based on the Track themes and others to be developed and will the fruits of these efforts be disseminated globally in a variety of ways? Will people understand this as a necessary and important task?
3. Will the temporary alliances, based on process-relational worldviews and ecological civilization, achieved during the conference between Whiteheadian and other process-relational thinkers hold? How will Whiteheadians handle the priority they feel needs to be given to Whitehead, and how receptive will non-Whiteheadians be to the interjection of complex Whiteheadian ideas into dialogues on the philosophical basis of ecological civilization? With respect to the purpose of bringing into being an ecological civilization, is it important that alliances between Whiteheadians and non-Whiteheadian process-relational thinking be maintained?
4. Whitehead and a wide majority of Whiteheadians are from the Global North. In view of the outsized role that the Global South, including China, will play in bringing into being an ecological

civilization, how important is it that specifically Whiteheadian thought spread in South America, Africa, Islamic states, Southeast Asia and other places for the purpose of bringing into being an ecological civilization? If it is important, what would the process community need to do to expand the influence of Whiteheadian thought in these areas? People have written of ontological politics—that as important as economic and social issues are between the Global North and Global South, equally important are issues involving multiple ontologies and multiple “modernities.” How will or should Whiteheadians foster and embrace such diversity?

5. Civilizational change has always occurred over centuries, not a few decades. How will Whiteheadians balance or maintain the tension between short-term efforts to mitigate environmental and social harm and efforts that will only have long-term effects? Would the failure, for example, to keep global warming below 2°Celsius defeat the objective of bringing into being ecological civilization? If ecological disruption is coming, how will the efforts of the process community be sustained during the “long emergency”?

### **Follow up Structures within the Process Community**

The primary structures for follow up within the process community are described below.

**The Center for Process Studies** located in Claremont, California, has long been the center of the process community. The conference website is maintained by CPS at [www.ctr4process.org/whitehead2015/](http://www.ctr4process.org/whitehead2015/). Information about CPS, its upcoming programs, and online resources is available at [www.ctr4process.org](http://www.ctr4process.org). CPS has two primary publications, *Process Studies*, an academic journal, and this magazine, *Process Circumstances*. Projects operating under the aegis of CPS are the **China Project**, the **Korea Project**, the **Latin American Project**, **Process & Faith**, the **Whitehead International Film Festival**, and the **Whitehead Research Project**. The Whitehead Research Project has its own website, [www.whiteheadresearch.org](http://www.whiteheadresearch.org). It is preparing a critical edition of Whitehead’s work that will be published by the University of Edinburgh Press in cooperation with Oxford University Press. Process & Faith brings resources of process thought to faith communities.

The China Project is a joint project of CPS and the **Institute for Postmodern Development of China** (IPDC), which is also based in Claremont, California. As stated earlier, process thought has spread rapidly in China, and IPDC has provided overall leadership in this. IPDC’s website is [www.postmodernchina.org](http://www.postmodernchina.org) and may be read in Chinese or English. IPDC publishes a newspaper in China and has held more than 60 conferences, including the annual Whitehead Summer Programs in China and annual Ecological Civilization Conferences in Claremont, California. All of Whitehead’s major works have been translated into Chinese as well as many other English books by process thinkers.

**The International Network** (IPN) is an unincorporated association of process-relational organizations and individuals. Its website is <http://internationalprocessnetwork.com/>. It was founded on January 6, 2001, at the “International Whitehead Summit” held in Claremont, California. IPN was “organized to support, generate and disseminate an international discourse on the meaning and implications of process thought across academic disciplines and conflicting truth-claims, and in relation to the entire community of life and the cosmos.” One of its most important roles has been sanctioning the International Whitehead Conferences—the June 4-7, 2015, “Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization Conference held in Claremont, California, was the 10th such conference. The 11th International Whitehead Conference is scheduled to be held in 2017 at the University of the Azores, in



the Azores Islands. The theme of the conference will be “Nature in Process: Novel Approaches to Science and Metaphysics.”



**Pando Populus** was brought into being as a co-sponsor of the Great Conference and as an instrument for dissemination and continuation of the work of the conference. Its name came from the largest and oldest organism on the planet, “Pando.” Pando is an aspen tree in southern Utah that spreads over 100 acres and weighs some 13 million pounds. “Populus” is the genus for aspen. Above ground, Pando appears to be a vast grove of individual trees. Underground they are all interconnected through a single root system. Each part is affected by and nourishes the other. It has survived this way for as long as 80,000 years. The name signifies profound interconnectedness. It reminds us of our remarkable ability to endure. And it embodies hope that we might rethink civilization in explicitly ecological, Pando-like terms. The website for Pando Populus is [www.pandopopulus.com](http://www.pandopopulus.com).

**Process Century Press** was also brought into being in preparation for the Great Conference. It is an academic press dedicated to transdisciplinary applications of process thought. The press will publish books emerging from the multiple Sections and Tracks of the conference, as well as other books that view scholarly issues and world concerns from a process perspective. The website for Process Century Press is <http://processcenturypress.com/>.

**Ecological Civilization International** (“ECI”) is a network of educators within the Associated Colleges of the South and other locations across the world who support the development of sustainable local communities and who offer courses on college campuses on ecological civilization. ECI was founded by Jay McDaniel of Hendrix College, Arkansas. Philip Clayton is now exploring options for expanding ECI and using it as a base for furthering the work of the Great Conference. The website for ECI is <http://colleges.org/networks/ecological-civilization-international/>.

In addition to organizations listed above, the **Co-Sponsors of the Great Conference** were (in the order listed in the conference program): *Ecological Civilization: China; California Interfaith Power & Light; Center for Ecozoic Societies; California State University at Northridge; Institute for Sustainability; CHERP;*

*Progressive Christians Uniting; City of Claremont; Claremont Graduate University; The Southern California Committee for a Parliament of the World's Religions; Murray Center; Case Western Reserve University: Fowler Center for Business as a Public Benefit; Pitzer College; Los Angeles Trade-Tech Community College; Claremont United Methodist Church; China National School for Administration; Sierra Club: Angeles Chapter; University of LaVerne; Claremont Graduate University: Drucker School of Management; The Next System Project; Spirit of Humanity Forum; Pomona College; Pilgrim Place; Claremont School of Theology; Yale Forum on Religion & Ecology; University of Southern California; American Teilhard Association; and Iliff School of Theology.*



### **Placing the Great Conference in the Context of the Global Movement for Sustainability**

The year 2015 may prove to be the turning point in the global movement for sustainability. In addition to the Great Conference at Claremont, these signal happenings have or will occur in this year:

- On June 18, 2015, the Vatican published the **papal encyclical “*Laudato Si’ On Care for Our Common Home.*”**<sup>6</sup> In this document, Pope Francis spoke directly to the more than 1 billion members of the Roman Catholic Church and indirectly to the entire human community about the ethical and religious obligations to address climate change and the degradation of the environment. In addition, he skillfully explained the relation between social justice and

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<sup>6</sup>The encyclical is dated May 24, 2015. It was published on June 18, 2015.

environmental justice. Further he gave meaning to and placed the term “integral ecology” into the global lexicon. From September 22 to 27, 2015, Pope Francis will visit the United States and address a Joint Session of Congress and the United Nations General Assembly.

- In the first of three crucial UN events of 2015, the **Third International Conference on Financing for Development** was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, June 13 to 16, 2015. The conference successfully concluded with the adoption of the “Addis Ababa Action Agenda” (AAA Agenda). The AAA Agenda “includes important policy commitments and key deliverables in critical areas for sustainable development, including infrastructure, social protection and technology. There were agreements for international cooperation for financing of specific areas where significant investments are needed, such as in infrastructure for energy, transport, water and sanitation, and other areas to help realize the proposed sustainable development goals.”<sup>7</sup>

The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda will be held from September 25-27, 2015, in New York and be convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly. In 2000 the UN Millennium Summit was held and from it emerged the Millennium Development Goals which provided overarching development goals for the years 2000-2015. Since the conclusion of the Third Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, in 2012 (Rio+20), the UN has been working on successor goals now known as the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). The MDGs focused on the needs of poor countries, the SDGs address issues relevant to changes needed in wealthy countries as well including four goals on the environment:

1. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
2. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
3. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
4. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

The United Nations has established six themes for interactive dialogue at the Summit:

1. Ending poverty and hunger, and addressing humanitarian emergencies
2. Tackling inequalities and leaving no one behind
3. Fostering economic transformation and sustainable consumption and production
4. Protecting our planet and tackling climate change
5. Strengthening governance for sustainable development
6. Delivering on a revitalized Global Partnership

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<sup>7</sup> “Historic Agreement on Addis Ababa Action Agenda,” UN Report, July 15, 2015, available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/07/countries-adopt-addis-ababa-action-agenda/>.

- Ten Thousand religious leaders from around the world will gather at the **Parliament of the World's Religions** from October 15-19, 2015, in Salt Lake City, Utah. There are three major themes for this important conference:
  1. Climate Change & Care for Creation,
  2. Income Inequity & Wasteful Consumption, and
  3. War, Violence & Hate Speech.
- The third of the crucial UN events to be held this year is the **Climate Change Conference**, which will be held from November 30 to December 11, 2015, in Paris. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) came into being in connection with the First Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. It entered into force in 1994 and currently has 196 signatories. The objective of the treaty is to "stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." The parties to the convention have met annually since 1995 in Conferences of the Parties (COP) to address issues related to the convention. The meeting in Paris will be the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting and hence it is technically called COP-21.

The only internationally agreed treaty limiting emissions coming out of the convention was the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. It established legally binding obligations for developed countries (Annex I countries) that adopted the Protocol (the United States did not), but not for developing countries including China and India. The first commitment period ended in 2012. A COP was held in Copenhagen in 2009 to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, but without success. In a 2012 meeting of the COP in 2010, 76 countries agreed to voluntary targets. At the Doha meeting of 2012 some countries agreed to a second commitment period, but others declined until targets would be applicable to major developing countries such as China and India. Those making commitments at Doha accounted for only about 15% of global emissions. At Doha there was a commitment to extend the Kyoto Protocol to 2020 and to set a date of 2015 for a successor document to be implemented beginning in 2020. There is a calendar for nations to confirm voluntary commitments to emissions reductions prior to COP-21 in Paris. These are called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).

The host country, France, lists these goals for the conference:

1. Firstly, an ambitious, binding agreement on climate change that applies to all countries.
2. Secondly, intended national determined contributions representing the investment that each country feels able to make.
3. Climate finance will also be a crucial component; in this regard, a milestone has been reached with the initial capitalization of the Green Climate Fund, amounting to \$9.3 billion, including nearly \$1 billion from France.
4. Lastly, local and regional initiatives developed by local governments, civil society organizations and businesses will boost mobilization and supplement the contributions made by states.

On March 31, 2015, the United States submitted its INDC, which was "to achieve an economy-wide target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26%-28% below its 2005 level in 2025 and to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28%." On August 3, 2015, the United States Environmental Protection Agency announced "The Clean Power Plan" which set standards for reducing carbon emissions by 32% from 2005 levels by 2030.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

The time has come for bold action to bring into being ecological civilization. The full realization of this objective may take more than a century, but the work must begin in earnest now and immediate action needs to be taken to mitigate climate change and further environmental degradation. There are many plans and proposals for economic, social and political reforms for this purpose, but less attention has been given to the humanistic side, or cultural side, of the needed transition.

On June 4-7, 2015, an unprecedented gathering occurred in Claremont, California, for the purpose of re-thinking and re-imagining civilization. This conference was only a beginning. Those gathered there and those who will join them have an important role to play in bringing into being ecological civilization. May our commitment and work be our continuing outcome of the Great Conference at Claremont. Though the challenges are great, we join in a work whose time has come with the support of the entire community of nations.