

**BRIEF RELECTION AS SUMMARY OF  
PAPER ON SOCIAL ANALYSIS FROM A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**Elizabeth M. Davis, RSM**

**10 November 2007**

***How Can We Dare Wisdom and Mercy  
in the Mosaic of Our Realities?***

*How Can We Dare Wisdom and Mercy in the Mosaic of Our Realities?* This analysis is not an end in itself but a catalyst for the daring of wisdom and mercy in this twenty-first century. There is a mosaic of realities – a new earth where the paths do not go where we expect and the mountains and valleys connect in ways we never before envisioned.

My analysis is framed in two parts. The key dimensions of community, person, and environment are always moving in a spiral swirling and connecting with each other in multiple, ever-changing ways. Forces of globalization, technology, consumerism and post-modernity are threatening to pull that spiral into a controlled and mono-cultural expression.

In this summary presentation, I will simply echo images from my paper all leading to the questions which such an analysis demands that we, as Sisters of Mercy, take seriously. References in brackets are given in more detail in my paper, “Social Analysis: A Canadian Perspective – How Can We Dare Wisdom and Mercy in the Mosaic of Our Realities?” My perspective is limited – my Canadian experience is reflected in the autumn leaf on each of the slides accompanying this presentation.

**Environment – a single image:** Our planet is becoming increasingly interdependent and fragile, and we are slowly destroying it. We must strive to bring forth a sustainable global society (Earth Charter, 2000).

**Person – four interconnected images:** (i) A wonderful but challenging experience for humanity is having four adult generations living at the same time, all formed by differing values. This challenging diversity of values is also reflected in religious communities – am I essentialist, existentialist, liberationist, or feminist (Chin, 2003). (ii) Women in every country on earth face issues of equity and empowerment. (iii) Health encompasses the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community as well as that of the individual, a whole of life view including the cyclical concept of life-death-life (Australian Aboriginal definition, NHMRC, 1996). (iv) Poverty is ironically imaged by a champagne glass – at the top, where the glass is widest, the richest 20% of the population hold three-quarters of world income. At the bottom, where the

glass is narrowest, the poorest 40% hold 5% and the poorest 20% just 1.5% (UN Human Development Report, 2005).

**Community – four images:** (i) Religion, church and spirituality are no longer necessarily connected. (ii) The “traditional” family is no longer the norm with increasing numbers of same sex couples, common law couples, single parent led families, families with no children, and multiple generation families with adult children at home. (iii) Computers are no longer seen as technology but as part of life (Frاند, 2000). Yet how many of us understand the language of iPod, iPhone, or Facebook or can send or even read a text message? (iv) Security is no longer simply about territory and nations and achieved through arms. Now we focus on security of people and individuals, attained through development, in their homes, jobs, streets, communities and environment (Mahbub ul Haq, 1997).

If these are some of the images of environment, person and community swirling in that spiral, there are forces threatening to contain and control that spiral. **Globalization** is one such force: \$4 billion in cross-border currency change hands every six hours, 800 million persons crossed international borders in 2005, and 40 million people migrate every year. Drug and private arms trade, terrorism, pollution, refugees, ocean and atmosphere, television, global warming, Internet, infectious diseases, and Mercy International Association know no borders. We share: “a community of common fate and responsibility” (Coleman, 2005). Two responses are emerging. One seeks global government, subordinating human rights and ecological concerns to economic needs and interests (Hug, 2005). The other seeks global governance rooted in values such as respect for human dignity, responsibility, solidarity, and accountability (Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community, 2001).

In a world where technology is developing rapidly and powerfully, a **culture of technology** has begun to take hold. Unlike the way she reads a book, a Sister clicks on her mouse to move through the web pages in a way which cannot be duplicated, inventing a pathway through cultural products which has never existed before and never will again (Kirby, 2003). How can this culture of technology be embedded in a global society founded on respect for nature, human rights, economic justice and peace? (Hogue, 2005)

The third force that threatens the dynamism of our spiral is that of **consumerism**, a force requiring that we always be unhappy. We slide from product to product, from relationship to relationship, from style to style, seldom lingering long before our internal inventory tugs us in another direction in search of different fulfillment (Wells, 1998). How can I be a counter-cultural witness, negating this lifestyle of consumerism, competition, hoarding, and unnecessary waste?

The most comprehensive and the most elusive of the forces is that of **post-modernity** characterized by the rejection of objective truth, the valuing of multiple forms of knowledge, deep suspicion of authority, a search for the

transcendent, a sense of fragmentation, the blurring of morality, the influence of the media, the weakening of government, a quest for community and living in the material world. One response calls for the resourceful creation of a new culture of life: a global network of diverse bioregional communities, the recovery of practical wisdom rooted in ancient traditions, a celebratory-prophetic spirituality of life, and an ecological-mystical consciousness (Holland, 2005). Where are wisdom and mercy present in this response?

Let us remember that these four forces are actually neutral in themselves. Each has both redeeming potential and damning potential. How our human community directs these forces will determine the extent to which they shatter our living spiral or swirl it into life-giving promise.

Now we, Sisters of Mercy, ask how we can dare wisdom and mercy in the midst of this mosaic:

1. How can we focus on the centrality of the Word when there is a rejection of objective truth?
2. What does theology mean when meta-narrative is no longer accepted?
3. What will be our expression of Church in a time when organizations are no longer credible?
4. What does spirituality mean when religion and spirituality are no longer seen as congruent?
5. How can we hold the integrity of multiple traditions while living in harmony?
6. What does solidarity mean in a world with multiple generations and increasing gaps between the richest and poorest?
7. How can women be leaders when gender equity and empowerment of women are still distant dreams?
8. How do we continue to live viable and credible religious life in a time when autonomy of individuals and distrust of authority are paramount?
9. How can the energy of a woman who lived before the modern age inspire a community that lives in a post-modern age?
10. What can we learn from history when “the maps they gave us were out of date by years”?

I present from my home the inukshuk as a metaphor for Sisters of Mercy as leaders. The inuksuit are lifelike figures of stone erected by the Inuit people in the Canadian Arctic to act as a compass or guide for a safe journey through the wilderness. Each individual stone in the inukshuk supports, and is supported by, the one above and the one below it, all secured through balance. No one piece is any more or less important than another. Its significance comes from its meaning as a whole. Most poignantly, a wise Inuit teenager in Labrador told me, “You can only build an inukshuk with broken rocks.”

As we dare wisdom and mercy, we acknowledge not only the broken rocks of our world today, but also the broken rocks of our congregations and the broken rocks of our own personal lives. Marie Chin says, "Compassion is born in the soil of vulnerability." Paul says, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor 12:9). We can be leaders, guides, and ones who dare wisdom and mercy only if we know and claim our broken rocks.

# "FIRE CAST ON THE EARTH - KINDLING": BEING MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**SOCIAL ANALYSIS:  
A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**  
*How Can We Dare Wisdom and Mercy  
in the Mosaic of Our Realities?*

*Elizabeth M. Davis, RSM  
10 November 2007*









globalization  
technology



community

person

environment

consumerism

postmodernity



# IMAGE OF ENVIRONMENT

Our planet is becoming increasingly interdependent and fragile.

We are slowly destroying it.

We must strive to bring forth a sustainable global society.



# IMAGES OF PERSON

- ✓ Four adult generations formed by differing values
- ✓ Reflections in religious communities (essentialist, existentialist, liberationist, feminist)
- ✓ Woman - equity, empowerment
- ✓ Health - social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community
- ✓ Poverty - the champagne glass



**Richest 20% = 75% of income**

**Poorest 40% = 5% of income**

**Poorest 20% = 1.5% of income**



# IMAGES OF COMMUNITY

- ✓ Religion/church/spirituality - a broken thread
- ✓ Family "traditional" no longer
- ✓ Computers no longer technology but part of life - iPod, iPhone, Facebook, text messaging
- ✓ Security of people, individuals, through development, in homes/jobs/streets/communities/environment



globalization  
technology



community

person

environment

consumerism

postmodernity



# FORCE - GLOBALIZATION

- ✓ \$4 billion in cross-border currency change hands every six hours
- ✓ 800 million persons crossed international borders in 2005
- ✓ 40 million people migrate a year
- ✓ **They know no borders:** drug and private arms trade, terrorism, money laundering, pollution, refugees, ocean and atmosphere, television, global warming, Internet, infectious diseases, **Mercy International Association**
- ✓ **We share:** "A community of common fate and responsibility"



# FORCE - CULTURE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Sister clicks on her mouse to move through the pages in a way which cannot be duplicated, inventing a pathway through cultural products which has never existed before and never will again.

How can this culture of technology be embedded in a global society founded on respect for nature, human rights, economic justice and peace?



# FORCE - CULTURE OF CONSUMERISM

- ✓ We slide from product to product, from relationship to relationship, from style to style, seldom lingering long before the shape of our internal inventory tugs us in another direction in search of different fulfillment.
- ✓ How can I be a counter-cultural witness, negating this lifestyle of consumerism, competition, hoarding, and unnecessary waste?



# FORCE - POSTMODERNITY

- \* Rejection of objective truth
- \* Valuing of multiple forms of knowledge
- \* Deep suspicion of authority
- \* Search for the transcendent
- \* Sense of fragmentation
- \* Blurring of morality
- \* Influence of the media
- \* Weakening of government
- \* Quest for community
- \* Living in the material world



# RESPONSE: RESOURCEFUL CREATION OF NEW CULTURE OF LIFE

- ✓ Global network of diverse bioregional communities
- ✓ Recovery of practical wisdom rooted in ancient traditions
- ✓ Celebratory-prophetic spirituality of life
- ✓ Ecological-mystical consciousness
- ✓ Where are wisdom and mercy here?



# QUESTIONS FOR RSMs

- ✓ How can we focus on the centrality of the Word when there is a rejection of objective truth?
- ✓ What does theology mean when meta-narrative is no longer accepted?
- ✓ What will be our expression of Church in a time when organizations are no longer credible?
- ✓ What does spirituality mean when religion and spirituality are no longer seen as congruent?
- ✓ How can we hold the integrity of multiple traditions while living in harmony?
- ✓ What does solidarity mean in a world with multiple generations and increasing gaps between the richest and poorest?



# QUESTIONS FOR RSMs

- ✓ How can women be leaders when gender equity and empowerment of women are still distant dreams?
- ✓ How do we continue to live viable and credible religious life in a time when autonomy of individuals and distrust of authority are paramount?
- ✓ How can the energy of a woman who lived before the modern age inspire a community that lives in a post-modern age?
- ✓ What can we learn from history when "the maps they gave us were out of date by years"?

