

INTERNATIONAL MERCY RESEARCH CONFERENCE

9 – 13 NOVEMBER 2007

**“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

June 30, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Paul wrote to the Romans (12:15), "Rejoice with others when they rejoice, and be sad with those in sorrow." *Gaudium et Spes* begins, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well." Inès Maria dell' Eucaristia wrote to the Daughters of Wisdom in 1994, "In this troubled world, we wish to express God's love for wounded humanity and always we must answer the question: how can we dare Wisdom in the mosaic of our realities?" We cannot know with whom to weep or rejoice or what their joys and anguish are unless we understand the mosaic of our realities. Only then can we dare wisdom and mercy.

In this paper, I seek to describe the mosaic of our realities. I am a woman from a rural community in the poorest province in Canada, a teacher and health administrator by profession, a baby boomer by generation, a Roman Catholic by religious tradition and a Sister of Mercy by life-choice. Each characteristic influences the way in which I see the world. The choice of elements, sources and structure in this paper will reflect that influence. My analysis will be primarily of society in Canada with significant application to other Western countries and some application to other countries.

The paper is in three parts: (i) my description of realities today, (ii) an analysis of this description through four lenses, and (iii) the naming of questions facing those who minister in the midst of these realities. The paper will not follow a sociological methodology but will be eclectic in its approach.

THE SOCIETY IN WHICH I AND WE LIVE

To put order in the description of today's realities, I envision the image of a spiral with the elements of environment, person, and community swirling in that spiral and connecting with each other in multiple, ever-changing ways. The length of the paper precludes an in-depth discussion of any element.

Environment

A recent statement on the state of our environment states, "The planet's warming is unequivocal, its impact is clearly noticeable, and ***it is beyond doubt that human activities have been contributing considerably to it.*** Adverse effects include: agriculture and food security, oceans and coastal areas, biodiversity and ecosystems, water resources, human health, human settlements, energy, transport and industry, extreme weather events."¹

The report expresses concern about the increased risk of extinction of 20 – 30% of plant and animal species, decreased fresh water availability, loss of biodiversity, significant changes in Arctic and Antarctic ecosystems, ground instability in permafrost regions, and impact on health of humans marked by increases in malnutrition, increased deaths, disease and injury due to heat waves, floods, storms fires and droughts; increased burden of diarrhoeal disease, and increased frequency of cardio-respiratory diseases.²

¹Fourth Assessment Report: "Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability," Report of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, April 2007. Summary for Policymakers.

² Ibid.

An internationally-negotiated response to this dire prediction is articulated in the Earth Charter (see Appendix A). It begins:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when
 humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes
 increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at
 once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward
 we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of
 cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth
 community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring
 forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for
 nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a
 culture of peace.³

Human activities, having led to this threat to our planet, can reduce vulnerability to climate change. Why are we not taking this threat and this opportunity seriously?

Person

Generations

We live in a time and place where, for the first time in the history of humankind, we now have four generations of adults living in large numbers at the same time. Each generation has been formed by different world events and developed different values and qualities:

CHART ONE: GENERATIONS LIVING TODAY

Qualities	Elders	Boomers	Generation X	Millenniums
Time of Birth	Pre-1946	1946 – 1965	1966 – 1979	1980 – today
Formative Elements	Patriotism, families, Great Depression, World Wars I & II, golden age of radio, growth of labour unions	Prosperity, focus on children TV, suburbia, Medicare, Cold War, women's liberation, space race	AIDS, stagflation, latchkey kids, single parents, computers, fall of the Berlin Wall, glasnost	Internet chat, school violence, TV reality shows, multiculturalism, the Gulf War, the Iraq War
Values	Dedication, sacrifice, hard work, conformity, order, patience, respect for authority, duty before pleasure, honour	Optimism, teamwork, personal gratification, health & wellness, personal growth, youth, work, involvement	Diversity, thinking globally, balance, techno-literacy, fun, informality, self-reliance, pragmatism	Confidence, civic duty, achievement, sociability, morality, diversity, street smarts, inclusion
Qualities	Conformists,	Driven, soul-	Risk-takers,	Optimistic, prefer

³ *Earth Charter: A Declaration of Fundamental Principles for Building a Just, Peaceful and Sustainable Global Society for the 21st Century* (New York: United Nations, 2000), preamble.

	conservative spenders, past-oriented, belief in logic not magic, loyalty to organization, wisdom, stability, experience	searchers, willing to "go the extra mile," love-hate relationship with authority, loyalty to profession, strong work ethic, achievement oriented	sceptical, family-oriented, bosses as colleagues, focus on the job not work hours, innovative, diverse range of skills, entrepreneurial & independent	collective action, techno-savvy, connected 24/7, embrace diversity & change, highly technologically advanced, entrepreneurial & independent socially responsible
--	---	--	---	--

This diversity of underlying values increases the challenges to understanding and respect among the generations.

Three aspects of the generational reality must also be noted:

- ✓ No country has ever before experienced large numbers of people over 65. In Canada, this is paralleled by a declining birth rate and less inter-generational living. There are implications for labour market adjustments, life-long learning, adjustments to pension plans and entitlement, long term care provisions, and policies for "ageing in place" and "active ageing." How we view the elderly, especially elderly women, calls for more intentional consideration especially in an age obsessed with youth.
- ✓ In Canada, the declining birth rate is not consistent across all groups. Aboriginal people and immigrants have higher birth rates resulting in a disproportionate percentage of children living in poverty with poorer health status.
- ✓ Increasing urbanization in Canada (close now to 80%) and most other countries means an increasing rural/urban divide: youth and young families continue to migrate from rural communities leaving behind an increasingly older population, and they are migrating to cities that are becoming more culturally diverse as migration across the world intensifies.

These generational and urban/rural complexities challenge governments and communities who strive to build societies that live in harmony while treasuring diversity.

Women

Women in Canada make up 50% of the total population but 69% of the population over 69 years of age. They constitute 47% of the workforce and have an average annual pre-tax income that is 62% that of men. They are more likely than their male counterparts to lose time from work for personal or family responsibilities, and to work part-time.⁴ The proportion of seats held by women in Canada's Parliament is 20.8% (compare Australia at 24.7%, the United Kingdom at 19.7%, the United States at 16.3%, and the United Nations at 9.4%).⁵

Stereotypical attitudes and practices are working to the disadvantage of women and girls in families, educational institutions, religious institutions, workplaces, political

⁴ Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. Fifth Edition. March 2006, 11 – 16.

⁵ *Women in National Parliaments* website. Information accurate for April 2007. Accessed May 15, 2007 at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif300407.htm>.

bodies and media. Gaps in efforts to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women include increasing violence against women, under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas, discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property and inheritance; disproportionate share of household and family responsibilities, lack of equal employment opportunities, lack of attention to mechanisms which support a balance between family and work responsibilities, disproportionate effects of poverty, devastating effects of conflict, impact of AIDS/HIV, and trafficking in women and girls.

Hannan expresses well what is needed: "An enabling environment for enhancing promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women needs to be developed by improving women's capabilities, including through education and health; increasing their access to and control over opportunities and resources such as employment, land and economic assets; enhancing their agency and leadership roles; as well as protecting and promoting their human rights and ensuring their security, including freedom from violence."⁶

Poverty

Growing economic, social and technological gaps exist between the richest and poorest citizens in wealthy countries like Canada and the United States and between the richest and poorest countries. After forty years of stability in the richest countries, income since 1980 has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the top 0.01% of earners. The ratio of CEO compensation to average production workers' pay, which had averaged 42 to one in 1982, was 10 times higher – 431 to one – in 2004.

Income in North America is now concentrated in the hands of the very, very wealthy to a degree not seen since before the Second World War. And with greater wealth comes greater political influence; public policy, including health policy, is increasingly driven by the priorities of the wealthy, overriding the concerns of the general population.⁷

In Canada, extreme poverty exists among Aboriginal people, recent immigrants and non-permanent residents, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, lone parent families and unattached individuals. Child poverty rates are disproportionately high among these vulnerable social groups. Approximately half (52%) of low income children in Canada live in female lone parent families. According to the 2001 census, 49% of children in recent immigrant families are poor.⁸ The chances of living in poverty decrease as education levels, employment activity and occupational skill levels increase.⁹

⁶ Carolyn Hannan, *A new world: A vision for gender equality and empowerment of women*, Address to Contemporary Woman Program at Brescia University, Owensboro, Kentucky, 06 April 2006, 14.

⁷ Robert G. Evans, "From World War to Class War: The Rebound of the Rich," *Healthcare Policy*, Vol 2, No 1 (2006), 15.

⁸ Campaign 2000, *Oh Canada! Too Many Children in Poverty for Too Long*, 2006 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada. Accessed on May 12, 2007 at www.campaign2000.ca.

⁹ Kevin K. Lee, *Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000).

For the world's poorest countries, the past decade has continued a disheartening trend: not only have they failed to reduce poverty, but they are falling further behind rich countries. The Human Development Report 2005 describes it this way:

If the world were a country, it would have had an average purchasing power parity income of \$5,533 and a median income of \$1,700 in 2000. The gap between median and average income points to a concentration of income at the top end of the distribution: 80% of the world's population had an income less than the average. Meanwhile, the average income of the top 20% of the world's population is about 50 times the average income of the bottom 20%. Global income distribution resembles 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 of the stem, where the glass is narrowest, the poorest 40% hold 5% of world income and the poorest 20% hold just 1.5%.¹⁰

The Millennium Development Goals are a global response intended to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 (see Appendix B). Is the achievement of these goals probable? The 2006 Human Development Report says, "Today, the world has the financial, technological and human resources to make a decisive breakthrough in human development. But if current trends continue, the MDGs will be missed by a wide margin. Instead of seizing the moment, the world's governments are stumbling towards a heavily sign-posted and easily avoidable human development failure—a failure with profound implications not just for the world's poor but for global peace, prosperity and security."¹¹

Health

Today health is usually defined as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹² An Australian Aboriginal definition broadens this definition: "Health does not just mean the physical well-being of the individual but refers to the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life."¹³ Key health issues internationally include food security and nutritional well-being, HIV/AIDS, tobacco, occupational health and safety, mental health, infectious diseases, violence, reproductive health, globalization and water, and globalization and health of indigenous peoples.¹⁴ Determinants of health such as biology, gender, socioeconomic status, education, ethnicity and age have significant effects on the health of all people. Globally, factors

¹⁰ United Nations Human Development Report **2005**, *International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*. Accessed on May 10, 2007 at <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>, 36.

¹¹ United Nations Human Development Report 2006, *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*. Accessed on May 10, 2007 at <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/>, 17.

¹² *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference*, New York, 19 June - 22 July 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

¹³ National Health and Medical Research Council, *Promoting the health of Indigenous Australians: A review of infrastructure support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health advancement* (Canberra: NHMRC, 1996), part 2: 4.

¹⁴ *Gender, Globalization and Health*, edited by H. Maclean and S.R. Sicchia (Canadian Institutes for Health Research: Institute of Gender & Health, April 2004).

affecting health include widening socio-economic inequalities between wealthiest and the poorest people, human migration and needs of migrating populations, impact of globalization on health and health systems including increasing mobility of health care professionals, new communication technologies, influence of private companies on provision of health services and insurance, role of international bodies and trade agreements, effects of climate change and environmental destruction, population growth, the overcrowding of urban areas and encroachment of human populations into previously uninhabited ecosystems, war, violence, terrorism, and gender inequalities.

COMMUNITY

Religion

Eighty-five percent of Canadians indicate affiliation with an established religion yet fewer than 25% attend church regularly.¹⁵ A Statistics Canada Report concludes that, in Canada, private devotion now plays a more important part in people's lives than attendance at religious services.¹⁶ There is increasing attention to activities that reflect spontaneity and community (e.g., meditation, pilgrimage to Iona, Divine Mercy devotions, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament). Sheldrake speaks of "a privatization of spirituality and a concentration of interiority that sometimes separates spiritual experience from a social or public vision of ethics. In contrast to the inherited polarization between sacred and secular, the roots of contemporary spirituality are to be found in an emphasis on human experience in all its variety and pain, as the immediate context of God's self-disclosure."¹⁷

Today's church members are diverse in their involvement in church. Reese, speaking about younger members, identifies *church in mission* (active in service and volunteer programs), *church in search* (single and divorced young adults over age of 30), *church youthful* (active in college ministry), *church apologist* (favouring devotional prayer and papal teachings), *church devotional* (Theology on Tap, parish activities), *church busy* (young professionals and young families), *church creative* (open to blending different faith traditions), and *church disconnected* (distant from church).¹⁸

Marie Chin, reflecting on diversity within religious communities, identifies four prevalent cultures co-existing today: (i) *essentialist* (unquestioning loyalty to church institutions, holding on to tradition and customs), (ii) *existentialist* (emphasis on the individual, democratic say in community, little patience for mutual responsibility, dislike of uniformity), (iii) *liberation* (conviction of preferential option for the poor, priority of justice, critical of unjust structures in church and society), and (iv) *feminist* (empowering self and others, mutuality of relationships, re-visioning and re-imagining, valuing inclusivity).¹⁹

¹⁵ Interview with Dr. Reginald Bibby, Professor of Sociology and Research Chair for Social Sciences, University of Lethbridge. Accessed online on May 10, 2007 at <http://www.innovationalberta.com/article.php?articleid=108>.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, *Canadian Social Trends: "Who's religious?"*, May 2, 2006.

¹⁷ Philip F. Sheldrake, "The Crisis of Postmodernity," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* (Summer 1996), 7.

¹⁸ Mary Anne Reese, "The Broad Spectrum of Young Adult Catholics. Refracting the Light," *America* 189 (September 22, 2003), 8 – 12.

¹⁹ Marie Chin, RSM, *Hunger for Right Relationships*, Presentation to the Congregation of Notre Dame Visitation Province in Halifax, Nova Scotia, July 2003.

Technology and Computer

The world has moved from the Industrial Age to the Information Age and now to the Network Age with its distributed, decentralized culture (citizen-centered not institution-centered). Frand characterizes the Network Age in this way: Computers are not technology but part of life, internet is better than TV, reality is no longer real, doing is more important than knowing, multitasking is a way of life, typing is preferred to handwriting, staying connected is essential, there is zero tolerance for delays, and the consumer and creator of information are blurring.²⁰ Words like iPod, iPhone, Facebook, MySpace, and text messaging define a new way of relating.

Hogue speaks of societal impact when computers are such a part of our way of life:

As consumers, citizens and scholar-educators most of us live, move and breathe in a technological whirlwind, and this profoundly affects our moral self-understanding, our interactions with others and our cultural and natural habitations. The moral problem of contemporary technology results not from its ubiquity and not from the power of its specific applications but from the dominance of a specific technological pattern, the device paradigm . . . this displacement, in spite of its seductive promises of liberation and enrichment, corrodes creative relationships between and among selves and between selves and their environments.²¹

Conflict, Security and Peace

The last two decades have demonstrated that the main threats to our security now come from terrorism, epidemic disease, organized crime, conflict over natural resources, climate change and environmental degradation. "Security is increasingly interpreted as security of people, not just territory; security of individuals, not just of nations; security through development, not through arms; security of all people everywhere – in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities, and in the environment."²²

Since 1990, more than three million people have died in armed conflict, and many millions more have died as a result of the disease and famine associated with war. Conflict is now strongly associated with poverty. During the period between 1990 and 2003, low income developing countries constituted more than half of all the countries and territories experiencing violent conflict.²³

At Assisi in 2002, Pope John Paul, together with 200 other religious leaders, articulated the *Ten Commandments of Peace* in response to this reality (see Appendix C). It is worth noting how little visibility this Decalogue has received.

²⁰ Jason Frand, "Thinking About Our Future: Supporting the Academic Mission," *Educause Review* (August 2000).

²¹ Michael S. Hogue, "Theological Ethics and Technological Culture: A Biocultural Approach," *Zygon*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (March 2007), 79.

²² Dr Mahbub ul Haq (1997) quoted in Oli Brown, "Trade, Aid and Security: an agenda for peace and development," *Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book*, 2007, 1.

²³ Brown, 2 – 3.

ANALYSIS THROUGH FOUR LENSES

Globalization

We live in a world increasingly ignoring borders. Travel and trade between nations increased fourfold between 1980 and 2000. Four billion dollars in cross-border currency now changes hands every six hours. Eight hundred million persons crossed international borders in 2005. Forty million people migrate a year. The number of migrants working outside their own countries is at least thirty million with billions of dollars yearly going back to their home countries. Scientific projects with international teams; 50,000 global NGOs; drug and private arms trade, arms control, terrorism, money laundering, pollution, refugees, ocean and atmosphere, television, global warming, the Internet, and infectious diseases know no borders and shape a “community of common fate and responsibility.”²⁴

This trans-border reality is one indicator that never before has change come so rapidly – in some ways, all at once – on such a global scale, and with such global visibility. The following description captures the inherent imbalance of the resulting globalization:

Globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of trans-continental flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world’s regions and continents. But it should not be read as pre-figuring the emergence of a harmonious world society or as a universal process of global integration in which there is a growing convergence of cultures and civilizations. For not only does the awareness of growing inter-connectedness create new animosities and conflicts, but it can fuel reactionary politics and deep-seated xenophobia. Since a substantial proportion the world’s population is largely excluded from the benefits of globalization, it is a deeply divisive and, consequently, vigorously contested process.²⁵

Global governance exists in a limited way today through the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. Corporations, mostly Western, are pressuring for a more extensive and powerful system of global governance that would allow them to promote global trade policies that serve their interests above those of less powerful actors such as smaller companies, indebted nations or small and vulnerable national enterprises. Such a system will effectively subordinate human rights, social values, ecological concerns and all other dimensions of the common well-being of the planetary community to the economic needs and interests of these corporations.²⁶

²⁴ John A. Coleman, “Making the Connections: Globalization and Catholic Social Thought,” in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*, edited by John A. Coleman and William F. Ryan (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005), 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14. Quoting David Held and Andrew McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 1.

²⁶ James E. Hug, “Economic Justice and Globalization,” in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*, 60-61.

Others seek a more humane globalization and are working toward a global ethic. The Commission on Global Governance report, *Our Global Neighbourhood*,²⁷ (see Appendix D) and that of the Commission of the European Catholic Bishops 2001, *Global Governance: Our Responsibility to Make Globalisation an Opportunity for All*,²⁸ are the most recent expressions of this global ethic.

Open economies will not be sustainable without the willingness of states to open up politically as well. The political will to achieve and maintain a system of global governance must be nourished by firm convictions and values. In a world where no single power – even the strongest – can or should exert full control, worldwide agreement on a list of basic values and principles is essential. Global governance, as opposed to global government, means a networked approach to global problems that involves governments, business and non-governmental organisations as well as Churches and other religious communities.²⁹

Both reports endorse common values for a global world: respect for human dignity, responsibility, solidarity, subsidiarity, coherence, transparency and accountability.³⁰

Postmodernity

Postmodernity concentrates on the tensions and similarity erupting from processes of globalization: the accelerating circulation of people, the increasingly dense and frequent cross-cultural interaction and the unavoidable intersections of local and global knowledge.³¹ It has been said that postmodernity is both “emancipatory and demonic.”³²

It is difficult to describe all the elements of postmodernity, but the following are key features: (i) *rejection of objective truth* (everything depends on personal perception) leading to many different traditions being equally valued and the seeking of faith without boundaries or definitions; (ii) valuing of *multiple forms of knowledge* leading to an acceptance of symbols, intuition, imagination and experiential learning; (iii) a sense of *all reality being fabricated* leading to a valuing of plurality, multiplicity and diversity; (iv) deep *suspicion of authority* leading to an aversion to meta-narrative because no meta-narrative is open or large enough to include the realities of all people (therefore, they are oppressive or unjust) and to rejection of institutions; (v) *search for the transcendent* with craving for reconnection with the spiritual all around us and relationship with all creation; (vi) an understanding of *salvation as intra-worldly* not extra-worldly leading to a separation of religion and spirituality; (vii) sense of *fragmentation* leading to self being constructed in a number of ways to suit the

²⁷ Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 1995).

²⁸ Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, *Global Governance: Our Responsibility to Make Globalisation an Opportunity for All*, 2001.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, forward, #3 and 4, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.* #5, 7.

³¹ Shannon Weiss and Karla Wesley, “Postmodernism and Its Critics,” *Anthropological Theories: A Guide*, Department of Anthropology, College of Arts and Sciences, the University of Alabama. Accessed on May 9, 2007, at <http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/Faculty/murphy/436/pomo.htm>, 2.

³² Paul Lakeland, “A Postmodern Apologetics,” in *Postmodernity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 89.

situation and world of isolated individuals and consumerism; (viii) *blurring of morality* leading to multiple standards of morality with expediency priming morality; (ix) *influence of the media* with confusion between truth and fiction; (x) *weakening of government* leading to greater power for multi-national corporations (xi) *quest for community* with relationship and participation as key to meaning; and (xii) *living in the material world* wanting the good things in life with time as a commodity.³³

Holland sets out four contending strategies promoted by societal elites who are attempting to define the new cultural era. He parallels these with alternative cosmological visions to promote a more resourceful creation of the new culture of life.³⁴

CHART 2: NON-AUTHENTICALLY ELITE POSTMODERN STRATEGIES

Strategy	Vision	Perspective	Threat
Economic neo-liberalism	Mechanistic colonization of planet	Ultramodern (objective-instrumental)	Ecological-social devastation
Academic reconstructionism	Deconstruction of all meta-narratives	Ultramodern (subjective-expressive)	Ethical relativism and nihilism
Religious restorationism	Reassertion of patriarchal values	Secure defence of ultramodern	Authoritarianism and militarism
Scientific bio-engineering	Scientific conquest of life	Total triumph of autonomous reason	Neo-totalitarianism

CHART 3: AUTHENTICALLY POSTMODERN ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENTS

Strategy	Vision	Perspective	Gift
Bioregional Economics	Global network of diverse bioregional communities	Authentically postmodern	Sustainable economic creativity
Neo-realist philosophy	Recovery of practical wisdom rooted in ancient traditions	Authentically postmodern	Re-rooting education in communal needs
Charismatic – prophetic religion	Celebration and defence of culture of life	Authentically postmodern	Celebratory-prophetic spirituality of life
Holistic-evolutionary Cosmology	Co-creative participation in evolutionary holism	Authentically postmodern	Ecological-mystical consciousness

In a world of fragmentation, ambiguity and the end of meta-narrative, how can we become creators of this new culture of life?

³³ Ideas drawn from a number of sources including Lakeland, "Postmodern Apologetics," Alan Kirby, "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond," *Philosophy Now* (58): 34 – 37; Daniel Cadrin, OP, "Postmodernity: Its Implications for Religious Life," Address to the General Conference of the Congrégation De Notre Dame on January 21, 2006; Graham Johnston, "Preaching to a Postmodern World," *A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

³⁴ Joe Holland, "Toward a Global Culture of Life: Cultural Challenges to Catholic Social Thought in the Postmodern Electronic-Ecological Era," in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*, 123.

Culture of Technology

Technological innovation and proliferation significantly shape our contemporary existence. The culture of technology is well described by Kirby: "The pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon par excellence is the internet. Its central act is that of the individual clicking on his/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."³⁵

Technological innovation and proliferation significantly shape contemporary human moral existence. This is because of both the obvious ubiquity of technology and the morally seductive, culturally embedded technological promise to manage the contingency and vulnerability of the good life. In light of this, I contend that one of the primary theological ethical challenges of our time is to think critically through technology's cultural pattern rather than simply its particular applications. . . development of a bio-cultural theological anthropology, then, provides an orientation to human moral life that binds critical appreciation of technological power with vigilant preservation of the cultural and moral ecologies within which the creative goodness of loving God and others flourishes.³⁶

We need to think theologically and ethically about the cultural pattern of technology and a vision for living responsibly within it:

Culture of Consumerism

Consumerism is a way of being in the world expressed in a moral and cultural attitude based on life-orienting beliefs prevalent in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies. It rests on a flawed anthropology that places a primacy on things by emphasizing *having* rather than *being*. It is a modern (and post-modern) phenomenon that has arisen with the market economy, a distinct cultural distortion of human freedom that occurs in the context of free markets, but is not a necessary result of free markets.³⁷

Wells expresses the tragedy of consumerism in this way:

Across a broad front we gather materials for the construction of ourselves. We build a public self in what we buy and what we voluntarily choose to do. This front runs from cuisine (Thai, French, faux furs?), to or Mexican tonight?), to fashion (Ferragamo shoes or particular products (antiques or Swedish contemporaries?), to music (Bach or the Grateful Dead?), to sexual lifestyles (monogamous or casual, heterosexual or gay?), to beliefs (Christian, New Age, or postmodern doubt?). Beneath it all is the same compulsion to be in a state of constant inward evaluation,

³⁵ Kirby, "Death of Postmodernism," 35.

³⁶ Hogue, "Theological Ethics and Technological Culture," 78.

³⁷ Gregory R. Beabout and Eduardo J. Echeverria, "The Culture of Consumerism: A Catholic and Personalist Critique," *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Vol 5, No 2 (Fall 2002). Accessed online on May 16, 2007.

taking an inventory of needs and wishes, and then reaching out for
a “product” to satisfy the felt emptiness and to project who we are.
This takes channel surfing to a high art as 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.³⁸

Kavanaugh concludes, “There is no intrinsic human uniqueness or irreplaceable value. The person *is* only insofar as he or she is marketable or productive. Human products, which should be valued only insofar as they enhance and express human worth, become the very standards against which human worth itself is measured.”³⁹ How can we be a counter-cultural witness, negating this lifestyle of consumerism, competition, hoarding, planned obsolescence, and unnecessary waste?

CONCLUSION

As Sisters of Mercy trying to make sense of ministry in this mosaic of realities in contemporary society, we are faced with troubling questions:

- ✓ How can we focus on the centrality of the Word when there is in our time a rejection of objective truth and confusion between truth and fiction?
- ✓ What does theology mean when meta-narrative is no longer trusted or even believed?
- ✓ What will be our expression of Church in a time and place when organizations are no longer credible and culture is person-centered not institution-centered?
- ✓ 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 distributed world, with multiple generations, and increasing gaps between the richest and poorest within and among countries?
- ✓ How can women be leaders in this age 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 freedom and autonomy of individuals 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 in a time when “the maps they gave us were out of date by years?”⁴⁰

And the ultimate question remains, “How can we dare wisdom and mercy in the mosaic of our realities?” Perhaps part of the answer lies hidden in these insightful words from a small Newfoundland outpost:

One boat sails east and one sails west
With the selfsame wind that blows.

³⁸ David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 88.

³⁹ John Francis Kavanaugh, S.J., *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986; revised edition, 1991), 22.

⁴⁰ Phrase from a poem by Adrienne Rich, *Twenty-one Love Poems –The Dream of A Common Language*, XIII (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974-1976).

It's not the gales but the trim of the sails
That guides where the good ship goes.

Let us have the insight to know that the good ships need to go in multiple directions, seek the wisdom of the winds that blow, and have the courage to trim our sails. Then perhaps we will be better prepared to dare both wisdom and mercy in our church and our society.

APPENDIX A

THE EARTH CHARTER (March 2000)

PRINCIPLES

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

THE WAY FORWARD

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

The Earth Charter is now increasingly recognized as a global consensus statement on the meaning of sustainability, the challenge and vision of sustainable development, and the principles by which sustainable development is to be achieved. It is used as a basis for peace negotiations, as a reference document in the development of global standards and codes of ethics, as resource for governance

and legislative processes, as a community development tool, as an educational framework for sustainable development, and in many other contexts.

APPENDIX B

MILLENNIUM GOALS

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction (both nationally and internationally))

Target 13: Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries' exports, enhanced program of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries [HIPC] and cancellation of

official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction)

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions)

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

[Some of the indicators listed below are monitored separately for the least developed countries, Africa, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states.]

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.

APPENDIX C

THE DECALOGUE OF ASSISI FOR PEACE

Pope John Paul II
Assisi, Italy – 24 February 2002

1. We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion, and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or of religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism.
2. We commit ourselves to educating people to mutual respect and esteem, in order to help bring about a peaceful and fraternal coexistence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions.
3. We commit ourselves to fostering the culture of dialogue, so that there will be an increase of understanding and mutual trust between individuals and among peoples, for these are the premise of authentic peace.
4. We commit ourselves to defending the right of everyone to live a decent life in accordance with their own cultural identity, and to form freely a family of his own.
5. We commit ourselves to frank and patient dialogue, refusing to consider our differences as an insurmountable barrier, but recognizing instead that to encounter the diversity of others can become an opportunity for greater reciprocal understanding.
6. We commit ourselves to forgiving one another for past and present errors and prejudices, and to supporting one another in a common effort both to overcome selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence, and to learn from the past that peace without justice is no true peace.
7. We commit ourselves to taking the side of the poor and the helpless, to speaking out for those who have no voice and to working effectively to change these situations, out of the conviction that no one can be happy alone.
8. We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we are desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and women of our time real hope for justice and peace.
9. We commit ourselves to encouraging all efforts to promote friendship between peoples, for we are convinced that, in the absence of solidarity and understanding between peoples, technological progress exposes the world to a growing risk of destruction and death.
10. We commit ourselves to urging leaders of nations to make every effort to create and consolidate, on the national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace based on justice.

APPENDIX D

REPORT OF COMMISSION ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE (1995)

OUR GLOBAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Co-Chairs: Ingvar Carlsson and Shridath Ramphal)

Our Global Neighbourhood suggests how the UN should be revitalised so it can better respond to the needs of the modern world. The Commission calls for a global neighbourhood ethic and commitment to core global values that can command respect across frontiers of race and religion. It also makes a plea for enlightened leadership that looks beyond the next election. The report makes clear that in urging action to improve governance, the Commission is not advocating movement towards world government.

The following issues are discussed in the Report:

- The Concept of Global Governance
- The Phenomenon of Change
- Globalization
- The Need for Vision
- Military Transformations
- A New Arms Race
- The Arms Trade
- The Rise in Civil Conflict
- Widespread Violence
- Economic Trends
- Persistent Poverty
- Eastern Europe's Experience
- Regional Groups
- The Private Sector
- Social and Environmental Change
- Population
- The Earth's Resources
- Global Media
- Agents of Change in Civil Society
- The Empowerment of People
- Enlightened Leadership

Key Recommendations from the Report are as follows:

1. Reform the Security Council, so that it becomes more representative and maintains its legitimacy and credibility
2. Set up an Economic Security Council to have more effective - and more democratic - oversight of the world economy
3. Establish a United Nations Volunteer Force so that the Security Council can act more quickly in emergencies
4. Vest the custody of the global commons in the Trusteeship Council, which has completed its original work
5. Treat the security of people and of the planet as being as important as the security of states
6. Strengthen the rule of law worldwide
7. Give civil society a greater voice in governance.

8. Explore ways to raise new funds for global purposes, e.g. a tax on foreign currency movements, and charges for using flight lanes, sea-lanes and other common global resources.