

Living with limits, living well!

Hints for neighbours on an endangered planet

Written by William F. Ryan sj and Janet Somerville

with Anne O'Brien gsic and Anne-Marie Jackson



Jesuit Forum
for Social Faith and Justice



CANADIAN CONFERENCE
OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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**CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
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What could change the direction of today's civilization? It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience.

It's not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on the Earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behaviour and a new set of values for the planet.

Václav Havel, playwright, essayist, poet and President of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

Foreword

When Pope Francis inaugurated his ministry on March 19, 2013, he evoked the image of St. Joseph, whose feast-day it was, to call us all to be protectors. He explained that to be a protector means “respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.”

How can ordinary people answer this call in the midst of a world economy that measures progress according to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while ignoring the growing gap between rich and poor, as well as the accelerating degradation of our environment?

The Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice offers this workbook to help us answer this question in three ways. Individuals and small groups will be able to:

- a) engage creatively to understand the economic structures that maintain unjust situations;
- b) discover how to challenge the culture of individualism that sustains such injustice; and
- c) learn how to integrate Catholic social teaching in their own choices as they build up the dignity of every human person, the common good and human solidarity.

The publication of this workbook is a sign of hope in our world. It is up to us to make this sign shine forth in our own lives, in our neighbourhoods, in our towns and cities and throughout our global village.

We can all become “protectors” of the world.

**+ Paul-André Durocher, Archbishop of Gatineau
President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

Still in Denial



© Patricia Storms

Climate change has occurred slowly enough for our minds to normalize it, which is precisely what makes it a deadly threat – because it fails to trip the brain's alarm, leaving us soundly asleep in a burning bed.

Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

What is the workbook and how to use it

This resource, while it has fascinating material which anyone would find interesting to read, is really designed for small (5-8) group discussion. It is more of a self-contained kit for any group to use, comprising reflections, stories and resources on some key themes for our world today. We encourage its use in parishes, justice and peace committees, universities, high schools, unions, community groups, religious communities, and workplace environments of every description.

The leader's role is important for the success of the sessions. He or she will be someone who is passionate about what is going on in our world and is likely someone who wants to change things for the better – for people and our planet.


The group process is not an intellectual exercise – it's much more about getting to know each other and sharing what each one is thinking and feeling about issues affecting us all. The written material will give some initial ideas. It is then for the participants to flesh out the content and bring their own experience to the group. The process of listening to each other deeply and exchanging ideas will foster creativity and suggest possibilities for ways forward.

Thoughts on starting a group to use the workbook

People will come if you invite them! If you are interested in delving into the themes, talk to a couple of others and together you'll find a small group. If you're in a parish or school, ask your pastor or principal for their support. They may well identify one or two participants. Decide on a date and place for the first meeting. Make sure to offer coffee, tea and snacks (if you feed them, they will come!). The group can then decide together the most suitable arrangements for on-going meetings.

The following are suggestions for preparing each session:

- 1) The reflections in the workbook are meant to be read by all participants before each session. Ask your group members to read the first reflection before your initial meeting.
- 2) The leader should be especially familiar with the reflection offered for each session.
- 3) Allow about an hour and a half for your session.
- 4) The leader welcomes everyone and opens with a short prayer.
- 5) Begin the first session by asking each person to take a couple of minutes to introduce who they are. This helps to build trust in the group. The emphasis should be on personal stories, rather than on what they do. It helps to ask people to include an event that has marked their life.

- 
- 6) Listening is key to group discussion. Limiting each participant's sharing to two or three minutes keeps the momentum going. We recommend sharing in rounds, each taking a turn, but passing as desired. For the first part of your meeting, it's best to listen to each other and to move to discussion later.
 - 7) Before each round, you might take a minute or two of silence to allow participants to gather their thoughts. This will encourage reflective sharing rather than debate.
 - 8) We suggest that one person be responsible for writing up the key ideas from the sharing to assure continuity for the following session.
 - 9) The role of the leader is to ensure the discussion begins and ends on time, to read the questions and ensure maximum participation.
 - 10) Close by agreeing on the date and time for the next session and end with a short prayer.

Towards a new economy: challenging the growth mantra

The talking heads on your TV or the dire headlines on your news app no doubt immerse you in the general worry about Canada's economy.

If you follow the debates that rage in parliamentary circles, you are no doubt concerned about the high levels of public debt that confront governments at all levels. At the same time, household debt in Canada is at an all-time high.

If you are caught in a seemingly endless search for a decent job, or if you know a young adult who faces today's high youth unemployment, you probably yearn for the time when the economy was expanding and steady paid work was easily available.

If you are responsible for decisions about investing – for a family, an organization, a pension fund or a diocese – you will be dealing with the impact of rates of return on investment that are dramatically lower than in times past.

Indeed, most of us are living in a world full of cuts to social services, salary freezes and unemployment, or having to choose between a growing economy and devastating climate change. Our leaders are accustomed to counting on economic growth to solve our public problems. But we (and they) are no longer sure that economic growth is the way of the future. The usual way of looking at things sees a very dark cloud covering the whole economic sky.

But what if there is a truly wonderful, God-given silver lining to this dark cloud?

What if we can dig deeper than all those worried media reports and discover longer-term reasons for hope, confidence and communal action?

What if we don't need record-breaking growth as the solution to the problems facing our generation?

Can we discover within our Christian tradition, in other faith-traditions, in the voices of

today's "green" pioneers and in the unexpected proposals of some economists, a more humane, joyful and spiritual vision than that of "growth at any cost"?

The anxious economic struggles of today could be a turning point into a future when we will have rediscovered simpler living, the joy of solidarity, the healing dimension of a slower, more rooted and less individualistic lifestyle. This could be our chance to delight in nature, as God's creation and our common home, taking skilled care to live wisely within the natural limits of our biosphere.

Can we bring to life for today the biblical and spiritual wisdom of the ages that warns us against putting our trust in riches and falling prey to the false god Greed? Can we feel the political energy that comes from a commitment to shrink the rich-poor gap and put long-term global human needs first on everyone's agenda?

Are we measuring growth – or disaster?

There is no doubt that we live in a time of crisis. The dragon's teeth we have sown in our environment are producing a harvest which we are still struggling to measure and to describe. Even the skeptics are beginning to fear that we have already harmed the planetary balance that has for millennia provided a stable climate within which human communities could flourish. How to take remedial action is an urgent question which confronts all of us here and now.

That serious search demands choices that put the health of the environment firmly ahead of growth, which has been measured for decades as GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Contrary to what we have been taught to believe, maybe the

Session One

GDP in Canada – and in “developed” countries more generally – need not increase year over year. The GDP gives value to a beautiful tree only when it is cut down for building or firewood. And it counts as economic progress the costs of devastating tragedies such as the hurricane in New Orleans, floods in Alberta and the oil tanker explosion at Lac Mégantic in Quebec.

To a growing number of influential thinkers, GDP as a measure of economic progress is of no use in assessing whether we are promoting or weakening the common good. Writing in the *New York Times*, Jon Gertner contrasts a “High-GDP” person with a “Low-GDP” person. Someone who buys prepared food, has an enormous flat-screened TV and drives a gas-guzzling SUV is a “high-GDP” contributor. On the other hand, those who grow their own vegetables, use public transit or limit their demands on energy aren’t as useful to society, measured by traditional economic worth.¹

A more discerning measure of how we are progressing is offered by Waterloo University’s Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), launched in 2011. Would you be surprised to learn that from 1994 to 2010, Canada’s GDP grew by a robust 28.9%, while our quality of life improved only by a modest 5.7%?²

The CIW is but one among a number of more comprehensive approaches to measuring

The Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, University of Kansas, 1968

human wellbeing. Of particular value is the Ecological Footprint, i.e., a measure of human demand on the Earth’s ecosystems.³ By measuring the Ecological Footprint of an individual, city, business or country, we can



assess our pressure on the planet. It now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what is used in a year. If everyone in the world consumed at the same rate as Canada, our Ecological Footprint would require 3.62 planets. The degree to which we live beyond Earth’s capacity is a serious threat to human well-being and the health of the planet.

In the 1990s, a U.S. based economic think-tank developed the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). The GPI uses 51 statistical measurements to gauge the total wellbeing and sustainability of regions, using economic, social and environmental factors. Edmonton economist Mark Anielski writes: “The GPI gives concrete expression to something many Canadians and Americans sense about the economy; that we are living off natural, human and social capital. We are cannibalizing both the social structure and the natural habitat to keep the GDP growing at the rate the experts and money markets deem necessary.”⁴

¹ Jon Gertner. “The Rise and Fall of the G.D.P.” *The New York Times*. May 2010.

² Canadian Index of Wellbeing, University of Waterloo Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/home>

³ Global Footprint Network. <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/>

⁴ Mark Anielski. “The Genuine Progress Indicator - A Principled Approach to Economics.” *Encompass*. October/November 1999. See also “Advantage or Illusion: Is Alberta’s Progress Sustainable?” *Encompass*. Vol. 5, No. 5, July/August 2001.

Towards a new economy: challenging the growth mantra

The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings...man [sic] is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. ... Whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of the deified market.

Pope Francis. The Joy of the Gospel. 55, 56

Can we imagine 'degrowth'?

It is time for new insights and difficult decisions. It is time for very deep change. For decades, pioneers in global ethics, in economics and in social philosophy have been searching for language to describe a horizon for public decision-making that makes sense for the human/ecological situation we are now facing.⁵

The phrase “a sustainable economy” has been useful in helping people notice that economic activity has to recognize and respect the rhythms set by nature’s regenerative capacities which our methods of production and habits of consumption must not violate.

Recently, a more dramatic term – “degrowth” – has been coined. Degrowth essays and studies have been appearing in many countries. A series of international conferences on degrowth began in 2008 in Paris. Montreal hosted the third conference in 2012, focusing on “Degrowth in the Americas”.⁶

This startling new word underlines the sharp change in economic thinking that is needed in order to chart a courageous path forward into a wiser future.

New centres and networks have appeared with the aim of deepening the ideas that could shape a transformed economic approach. You

can check them out. Try the New Economics Institute, Friends of the Earth International, 350.org and CASSE (Centre for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy), to name only a very few.⁷

Degrowth thinkers are not against all types of economic growth. In countries where traditional or subsistence economies have been shattered (perhaps many generations ago) by the forces of the “modern” world, economic growth is surely necessary.



Text and photo courtesy of Oxfam Canada's GROW campaign.

Inclusive growth: Women transform the world. We work the land, we produce food. We demand land and investment, recognition and justice!

⁵ Joseph K. Ingram. “Global Growth, the Quality of Growth, and the Critical Need for a New Paradigm.” In *International Development in a Changing World*. (Edited by Kate Higgins). Ottawa: North South Institute. 2013.

⁶ <http://montreal.degrowth.org/index.html>

⁷ New Economics Institute, <http://neweconomicsinstitute.org/>; Friends of the Earth International, <http://www.foei.org/>; 350.org, <http://www.350.org/>; CASSE <http://steadystate.org/meet/>

What is needed, however, is “inclusive growth” that respects environmental limits and provides basic health, education and a dignified standard of living for all.⁸ What must be resisted is the blind *growth imperative* promoted by conventionally-trained business and political leaders. Usually this imperative takes the form of competition for the highest possible rate of return on invested capital. (If your company doesn’t grow financially, quarter by quarter, the stock market will punish you and support your competitors.)

For governments, the imperative is more likely securing increased revenue from increased business activity and (hopefully) increased employment. Socialist economies can also suffer from their own strains of the must-grow disease. And in our personal economic choices, many of us are conditioned to think that more is better without careful reflection on the consequences of “more.”

Discovering a ‘Covenant Economy’

Is restraint a brand new idea? Certainly not. The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament have always understood how we need to protect community, the land and personal and family integrity against a compulsion to get rich quick (or get rich at all!) or to expand at any cost. So have great voices like those of Mahatma Gandhi, Hannah Arendt, Karl Polanyi, Wendel Berry, E.F. Schumacher, a long list of popes from Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), released on November 24, 2013.

A thumbnail summary of this age-old alternative might be: Enough really is enough when it’s made well, used well and shared well!

If you cut a tree, the GDP goes up. But if you preserve the tree, the GDP does not grow. Now you have to decide whether you need the tree or the GDP.

Journalist Devinder Sharma, New Delhi-based analyst on trade and food policy

So the idea is not new, and the practice itself has never quite died out. There are in our midst economic models that can thrive and meet many human needs, without putting “growth” first on their agenda. A very good example is the co-operative movement, based on the belief that industries and commercial concerns should be owned and controlled by the people working in them, for joint economic benefit.⁹

Other forms of social enterprise are taking root in various countries – businesses that meet payrolls, achieve production goals and serve consumers well, but which openly put the needs of the local community ahead of rate of return on investment or maximum profits for shareholders.

There are themes in the Bible and throughout the Christian tradition that will come roaring to life in your mind and soul as you study today’s real world, and tomorrow’s possibilities, with these questions and issues in mind.

Long ago, the living God led a straggling collection of Hebrews out of wealthy, slave-owning, empire-expanding, pyramid-building Egypt. Stage by stage, God led them into a space of freedom where the people could build a caring, modest and grateful economy. Let’s call it the Covenant Economy.

That transforming God is still our God, still calling us into a new space for our regeneration. Jesus, our brother, walks with us on these journeys, making sure that the loaves and fishes will feed all of us, opening our eyes to paths of justice when we adjust our compass according to God-given wisdom.

⁸ See <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pages/newsite/menu/inclusive/whatisinclusivegrowth.jsp?active=1>

⁹ See the story of the Antigonish Movement in Canada http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antigonish_Movement

Towards a new economy: challenging the growth mantra

Conversion – still the bottom line

Yes, we do need new eyes. Before we can change our society's economic tool-kit and transform the priorities of our governments, we need conversion – each of us and all of us as a community. We need transformation in our mind-sets, in our habits and in our social imagination.

One conversion we specifically need is a new way of seeing the relationship between nature and the economy. And our God, who is the source of all creation and who to this very moment is still providing for us, and teaching us to provide for ourselves and each other, will delight to “lead us in right paths.”¹⁰

We hope that this book of resources will help groups of believers to think and pray about a new economy that will be more in tune with the Creator's heart. We hope it might be useful in parishes and schools, around dining tables and in union halls or board rooms – indeed wherever friends and strangers gather in faith and hope to consider our stewardship of God's world.

Share your insights

1. What most interested you, surprised you or annoyed you, in reading this reflection?
2. Young people (and lots of adults) easily feel second best without the consumer items so strongly promoted through advertising and in the media. Among your friends, or in your family, do you know anyone who consciously resists this pressure? Do you resist it yourself? Why?
3. What can you do to challenge the growth mantra?
4. Governments use GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a way of measuring growth and prosperity. GDP is now being criticized because it hides, or ignores, so many important problems and challenges we need to face.

What are some important items you value that are not valued in the GDP?

¹⁰ See Psalm 23, verse 3.



NOTES:



What on Earth do you mean, a ‘Covenant Economy’?

In this set of conversations, we’re talking about something very this-worldly: the hotly debated idea of a “degrowth movement” in today’s evolving understanding of how to construct a sustainable economy.

The earliest of these commands is the mandate given, symbolically, to the original human being at the dawn of Creation. As soon as the breath of life had been breathed into this new creature, divinely fashioned out of the soil itself, “the



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“Degrowth” is a way of referring to the conviction that governments, business people and citizens – especially in the so-called “developed” countries – should stop taking for granted that unceasing growth or increase in GDP (Gross Domestic Product), or in shareholder value, or even in take-home pay, is the primary measure of whether or not we are “doing well.”

Many people acknowledge that moral and ethical issues are embedded in any important economic issue. But the structures of the economy and the affairs of corporations aren’t usually considered religious matters. So why bring the bible in here?

Well, from the very beginning, the God of the bible shows intense concern with how we treat each other, and the Earth. Economic behaviour is a hugely important area within which we human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, are accountable to the two radical commands that give meaning to our lives.

Lord God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.”¹¹ From the beginning, we are responsible for God’s beautiful creation. And that task, shared with other people, can “fill us with joy,” as later Scriptures attest.

The second commandment, with two inseparable parts, is the foundation of the “whole Law and the Prophets: You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.”¹²

This is what is burningly real at the heart of faith. There is a real planet, Earth, which the Creator “furnished” to be a home for us. And there are human beings – me, you, everyone – created by this same God with a mandate to love one another. That’s real.

¹¹ Genesis 2: 15

¹² See Deuteronomy 6: 4; Leviticus 19: 18; Matthew 22: 38-40

“The economy” isn’t quite as real as that. The phrase is an abstraction, like “the market.” When we speak of those human arrangements as if they operated according to fixed laws, like the laws of physics, it becomes easier to evade responsibility for arrangements that do not respect the good of the “neighbour” as well as one’s own good.

History shows us that humans have lived in a great many different kinds of economies. In some cases, an economic arrangement shows great concern for the well-being of all the members of society. In other cases, the privileged do well while many are exploited. The same is true for how an economy respects the natural environment – or fails to do so.

Redeeming a fallen economy

Christians are used to the revealed idea that ours is a “fallen” world. We believe that God’s initiative, throughout the history of salvation, sets those who are open to God’s grace on pathways that lead to a redeemed world. The Word of God became incarnate on this Earth, in our history, so that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we could see and embrace the struggle that redeems and renews the whole of Creation.

That’s not a new idea. That’s just ordinary, radical Christian faith.

Now let’s think the same thought, but using a more specific way of referring to “the world.” We live within a fallen economy. Every human community is constantly pushed in destructive or healthy directions by the patterns and forces embedded in its economy. God’s revealing grace opens our eyes to what is good and what is evil in the economy of our time and place. God’s redeeming energy is offered to us so that we can be partners with God in patiently turning the intricacies of our economic life in the direction of everyone’s human dignity, all-inclusive love of neighbour and reverent delight in God’s good creation.

Key insights of the Covenant Economy

We who live in the 21st century can’t literally duplicate the economic practices and rules of a small agricultural nation that thrived in the Middle East some 3,000 years ago. But we can ponder the inspired purpose and meaning of what they were called to do.

First of all, they understood work as supporting and cherishing family and community within God’s good creation. In ancient Israel, every family had land assigned to it. Land was not speculative property to be exploited for personal benefit – you took care of it, gratefully, from generation to generation. It stayed in the family as a sacred inheritance. If you messed up or got sick and couldn’t manage, a relative took it over.

If your extended family wasn’t up to that and a wealthier neighbour wanted to buy your land, that was tolerable – but only for one generation. In the Year of Jubilee, proclaimed every 50th year, land had to be returned to the family that had lost it in the previous generation. In that way, inequality couldn’t keep on growing. A family could become marginalized and dependent on others for a time, but the next generation had to have its full chance to belong, to have a share in responsible work and decision-making, to be “equal” and productive.

Second, work is central to life, but work isn’t everything. We are not mere “factors of production.” Everyone gets to have leisure and everyone gets to share, not only in the good fruits of work but in the meaning of work. *“For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for the Lord your God. You shall do no work on that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter, nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day God rested.”*

What on Earth do you mean, a 'Covenant Economy'?

And it wasn't just the Sabbath; there were many "breaks" in the working year when communal celebration – no-one excluded – was the order of the day: *"You must celebrate the feast of Tabernacles for seven days, at the time when you gather in the produce of your threshing-floor and winepress. You must rejoice at your feast, you and your son and daughter, your serving men and women, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow who live in your towns. For seven days you are to celebrate the feast for the Lord your God in the place that the Lord chooses, for the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and all your handiwork, and you will be filled with joy."*

Third, land (like us!) isn't just a "factor of production." Land is more important than money, more important than immediate profit. Essentially, land belongs to its Creator. It has its own needs and rhythms to which we need to be attentive: *"For six years you shall sow your field, for six years you shall prune your vine and gather its produce. But in the seventh year the land is to have its rest, a sabbath for the Lord. You must not sow your field or prune your vine ... The sabbath of the land will itself feed you and your servants, men and women, your hired labourer, your guest, and all who live with you."*

Money is primarily for sharing, not for making more money: *"If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns ... do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be."* Your neighbour should, of course, repay you – if he can. If he can't, then in that seventh year, the "sabbatical" year when the land has rest, the debt must be forgiven, so that even the poor can rest and rejoice.

Share your insights

1. How could these key elements of a Covenant Economy be significant for our reality today?
2. How do you reclaim Sabbath time in your life?

Managing a worldly economy

Let's look at this huge picture in more biblical terms: Why did God lead the chosen people out of Egypt? After all, Egypt was magnificently successful. It was wealthy, politically stable, technologically leading-edge. Egypt was a world power with a brilliant culture. Think of the story in the Book of Exodus and how the Israelites lamented to Moses on their desert journey to the Promised Land: "Why did we not die at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we were able to sit down to pans of meat and could eat our fill of bread?" Even slaves in Pharaonic Egypt had enough to eat.

The Egyptian economy depended heavily on slavery. Slavery is very efficient. It assures a constant supply of labour. It gives decision-makers the power to adjust the size of the available labour supply at any time. Remember the opening story of the Book of Exodus:

"Then there came to power in Egypt a new king ... He said to his subjects, 'Look, the Israelites have become so numerous and strong that they are a threat to us. We must be prudent and take steps against their increasing any further, or if war breaks out, they might add to the number of our enemies and fight against us and so escape out of the country.' ... Pharaoh then gave his subjects this command: 'Throw all the boys born to the Hebrews into the river, but let every girl live.'"

That's rational planning when you live in a fallen economy and are formed only by its sources of information, its images and mandates. You adjust human life to suit the demands of the economy, rather than the other way around.

In the dramatic story of the Exodus, God goads the Israelites to get out of that thought world. Nothing about that escape is easy: there is risk, doubt struggling with faith, even conflict among the liberated people. It wasn't easy to grasp the new thoughts being offered through Moses by the mysterious God who was leading the journey.

What is God telling us about a Covenant Economy?

It is a fascinating, challenging exercise to read Scripture with this question in mind: what is God telling the people about their economic life? Ancient Israel's Covenant Economy is described mostly in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In later biblical books (1 and 2 Samuel and Kings and in the visions of the prophets), we see how far the people of Israel drifted away from the priorities of this inspired economy, and how eagerly and blindly the kings (especially Solomon) imitated Egypt and the other world-dazzling empires.

Consider the saga of Solomon in the First Book of Kings. He inherited from earlier generations a thriving agricultural economy. But he wanted much more and became a brilliant trader. Obsessed with "growth centres" – he made his capital city, and the temple and palaces that

he built in it, dazzlingly magnificent. Solomon saw the agricultural produce of rural Israel (and the splendid natural forests of the mountains of Lebanon) as raw material for huge regional trade deals. It worked, in terms of making the metropolis of Jerusalem a tourist magnet and a wonder of the world.

But the agricultural tax system on which his trade deals depended so enraged the "hinterland" communities that at the end of Solomon's reign all the northern tribes rebelled, the kingdom split in two, and the rupture never really healed. The stories in the First Book of Kings show Solomon becoming more and more "pagan" in his vision of success. Over time, he lost the fidelity that helps us to recognize true priorities and necessary limits.



© Pete Williamson

Oil Sands

What on Earth do you mean, a 'Covenant Economy'?



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Solomon got carried away by the alluring “rules” of success, copied from a world shaped by domination and submission rather than by love of neighbour. That can happen to all of us. In fact, it has happened, over and over again. But, over and over again, people and movements have insisted on restoring to the economy of their time elements of inclusiveness, equality, compassion and respect for one’s neighbour.

Sometimes those movements bear fruit in socially important laws – like medicare, unemployment insurance, minimum wage, disability support programs, Old Age Security and many others. Sometimes they bear fruit in the way a business is run, the way land is cared for and farm animals treated, the care taken of water and other natural resources. Sometimes, love of neighbour blossoms in courageous efforts to aid people in distress even in distant countries.

Redeeming a “fallen” economy is always a struggle. But it is a profoundly human vocation, and the living God blesses such effort. The opportunities are limitless, and as varied as the people who respond to them. Let us pray that we may recognize the opportunities that open before us in our own lives, in our own time.

Share your insights

1. Can you describe a particular economic arrangement you have known – a well-run business, a company pension plan, or a housing co-op – that reflects for you God’s command that we love our neighbours as ourselves?
2. Do you feel any responsibility to support and protect the farmers and farmland in your own province, or locality? If so, how do you work it out in today’s circumstances?
3. “You must celebrate the feast of Tabernacles for seven days, at the time when you gather in the produce of your threshing-floor and winepress. You must rejoice at your feast, you and your son and daughter, your serving men and women, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow who live in your towns” (Deuteronomy 16 :13-14).

What are some ways in which modern economic life can promote responsible, joyful human community?

The economy has gone global: do we need global rules?

Have you noticed that in recent years, citizens – and media – seem to talk about their national governments mostly in tones of disappointment, low expectations and acid criticism? Political commentators often mention the historically low participation of young people in electoral politics and worry that alienation from public life, or at least lack of enthusiasm for democratic effort, are the new normal for far too many citizens.

Multinational corporations are superbly adapted to function powerfully in this new frame of reference. Their managers can plan globally, scanning the world for the cheapest sources of human labour and natural resources and the most receptive markets. This can place severe limits on how national governments exercise their traditional responsibility for protecting and promoting our economic health, as well as other elements of the public interest.

To give one example: when national governments sign free trade agreements, they limit their ability to set priorities to protect the environment or otherwise serve the good of their own people. Writing about the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, Roy Culpeper and John Jacobs observe: “Corporate interests and investor rights are ... increasingly privileged over policies of democratically-elected governments. Ultimately this diminishes the ability of governments to serve the public interest.”¹³

On the other hand, there is something wonderful about this new global frame of reference. The world really is one world: God created it that way. The whole human family – not just our own nation – must matter to all of us. That has always been true ethically, but now it is practical

in ways never before possible. Due to economic globalization, world-wide instantly-available media and the internet, we really do live in a “global village.” We can help each other across vast distances, but also harm each other across those same distances with a speed that our consciences have a hard time keeping up with.

Some of the technology that has made globalization possible is brilliant, and we are only beginning to explore how the world’s new electronic connectedness can be used by good people in the never-ending struggle for social justice, truth-telling and mutual accountability in the human family.

However, some of the ideas that have shaped globalization are not so brilliant.

¹³Roy Culpeper and John Jacobs. “CETA undermines Canada’s ability to benefit from increased trade.” *Ottawa Citizen*. March 7, 2013.



There are objective reasons for this shrinkage of status suffered by national governments. Some major trends of the past 40 years have combined to make them considerably less “in charge” than they used to be. One dimension of the huge contemporary phenomenon we call “globalization” is that the controlling function that national borders once played in economic activity has been vastly reduced.

A case in point: with today’s technology, a multinational corporation or a financial agency can, in a flash, send massive capital funds to any part of the world without any reference to governments, and with no accountability for the impact the resulting shift of funds has on a local economy.

The frame of reference in which corporations do their planning can no longer afford to be merely national; the competition is international, the opportunities are global and you’d better not be stuck in the mud of your native land if you are on the Board of a corporation that intends to grow.

Winners and losers in a 'free market' economy

During the 1970s, there was a resurgence of individualism as a social philosophy and of laissez-faire or free-market ideology as an economic prescription. A collection of ideas often referred to as "neo-liberalism" promoted a big push towards smaller government, fewer regulations, free markets, free trade and free flows of capital. Individual rights and property rights were protected while collective rights, especially those of labour and of migrants, were weakened. Governments, favouring owners of private capital over the common good, pursued policies of fiscal restraint in the name of competitiveness even as they weakened or dismantled social programs.

These ideas had varying results, partly because of the wide differences in the situation of countries where they were adopted (or on which they were imposed by agencies like the International Monetary Fund). In the past decade, some developing countries, notably Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (often called the BRICS), have become economic power-houses whose global trade grew to nearly 16% in 2012, with accompanying influence in world affairs.¹⁴

On the other hand, many poor countries have weak national governments with underdeveloped institutions for education, health, banking and credit, courts and law enforcement. Such nations lack the governance and financial capacity to bargain effectively, usually behind closed doors, with sophisticated state and corporate officials.

A *laissez-faire* approach to negotiating trade deals or other investment contracts in such situations is usually a recipe for exploitation.

Critics of the present balance (or imbalance) of public versus private power in the world have some startling things to say about the results of the shift towards private agency that accelerated when capitalism declared that it

I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. . . . Corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money-power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.

Abraham Lincoln, 1864

had won the Cold War. David Rothkopf, an advisor to President Bill Clinton on international affairs, claims that many states today are only "semi-states."

Rothkopf observes: "Private actors have grown so large that perhaps two thousand of them are more influential than those of 70 to 80 percent [of nation-states]. These private actors are a new class of supercitizens, entities that can marshal and project to their advantage the economic, human, natural, or political resources that once were available only to nations.

"Ask why the world can't or won't address concerns from global warming, to embracing new forms of energy, to containing global diseases, to regulating derivative markets, and you will see the not-so-visible hand of these megaplayers. ... These enduring private actors ... have morphed into a group ... with the money and the power to institutionalize their ideologies and serve their interests by successfully supporting efforts to translate their ideas into laws or, alternatively, carefully carve out legal and regulatory voids."¹⁵

The prestige of "neo-liberal" economic thinking took a nose-dive during the global financial crises of 2008-2009. Without effective regulation, banks and investment houses abused their privilege of creating new money on the basis of debt. They financed mortgages for people with little evidence that they could sustain the repayments. They "packaged" chunks of debt and sold them to other creditors for profit, even when they knew the bubble was about to burst. When it did burst, governments rushed to bail out these huge financial agencies, fearing the chaos that would rock the whole economy if they suddenly locked their doors.

¹⁴ Joseph Ingram and David Poon. "BRICS: A New International Economic Order." In *International Development in a Changing World: Canadian and Global Perspectives on Growth, Aid and Global Governance*. Ottawa, ON: North-South Institute. 2013. p. 18

¹⁵ Robert Rothkopf. Power, Inc.: *The Epic Rivalry between Big Business and Government – and the Reckoning that Lies Ahead*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2012. p.18

The economy has gone global: do we need global rules?



Clay Bennett, Chattanooga Times Free Press

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Time to re-think the 'neo-liberal' world order

This second decade of the 21st century needs sober second thought. Many aspects of the global economic scene hover in a kind of danger zone. The gap between rich and poor has increased in many destructive ways.

Political pressure makes governments reluctant to put sufficient funds into the economy to make an effective difference in rates of unemployment and poverty. A process called “financialization” (including bailing out huge financial agencies) has bloated the financial sector to the point where it has become much larger than the “real” economy, i.e., the production of actual goods or services. The concentration of wealth in a small elite (the 1% decried by the Occupy Movement in 2012) is rapidly eroding both political and economic democracy.

Those who recognize the need to reassess such perilous economic policies tend to be in one of two camps: some want to keep most of the elements of the neo-liberal order by promoting reforms of the financial system (advocating for a minimum wage, for example); others would impose more radical reforms, even transformative measures. So far the first group seems to be winning the day.¹⁶

Sober second thought is a very good thing! Critics of greed and of short-term thinking, can draw from deep wells of ethical wisdom and join the global search for better answers at a time like this. Pope Benedict XVI certainly did so in *Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth)*, published in 2010, calling for “a complete re-examination of development.”

Benedict points out that the financial crisis: “presents us with choices that cannot be postponed. ... The technical forces in play, the global inter-relations, the damaging effects on the real economy of badly managed and largely speculative financial dealing, large-scale migration of peoples, the unregulated exploitation of the Earth’s resources: all of this leads us today to reflect on the measures that would be necessary to provide a solution to problems that are ... of decisive impact on the present and future good of humanity.”

Since national governments are facing new limits and difficulties, some of the rules and regulations

¹⁶ See “Signposts of a New Financial Architecture” at <http://www.kairoscanada.org/sustainability/policy-briefing-paper-33-signposts-for-a-new-financial-architecture/>

needed to prevent crises must be forged at the international level. A clear argument for a global public authority on finance was offered in 2011 by Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.¹⁷ A good working balance between the need for some international regulation of a globalized economy and the need of nations, businesses and communities for the freedom to work out their own solutions is a complex task that will take a long time.

A second, crucial angle of vision is ecological. We can't go on hoping that a rising tide of more of the same will lift all our boats. We are the first generation to have received the urgent message that 20th century-style economic expansion has to step back, accept restraint and learn the many skills that will attune our economic life to the limits and the health of the natural environment – of Creation itself. Ecological wisdom must be a senior partner in the shaping of new models of economic development.

Social scientist Edgardo Lander observes that in responding to so-called “market failures,” entrenched interests are tempted to reject the truth that there is a single driving force at work, namely maximization of short-term profits. This imperative overrides all other values - equality, solidarity, protecting democracy, even the preservation of life itself.¹⁸

Pope Francis, in *The Joy of the Gospel*, expresses it this way: “In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.” (56)

When it comes to imagining the right global rules for our globalized economy, we surely need the wisdom revealed by the Covenant Economy.

What happens in China matters to us all

After the 2008 financial crisis, the joke circulating in Beijing was:

1949: only socialism could save China
1979: only capitalism could save China
1989: only China could save socialism
2008: only China could save capitalism

However, a new, frightening verse could be heard when the Huai River became polluted by coal-fuelled industries and “cancer villages” began to appear:

In the 50s, we washed our clothes in the clean river.
In the 60s, we irrigated our fields with its waters.
In the 70s, we saw our river turn black and oily.
In the 80s, we watched dead fish float to the surface.
In the 90s, we too started to fall sick.

Jonathan Watts. “When a Billion Chinese Jump: How China Will Save Mankind - or Destroy It.” Faber and Faber. London, England. 2011

Share your insights

1. Private, for-profit multinational corporations can be highly efficient and innovative. Why shouldn't they rule the world?
2. “Whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of the deified market.” If Pope Francis' convictions about the “deified market” were to lead to changes in the global economy, what might these be? How could you support such changes?
3. We are more interlinked globally than any previous human generation. Why is it still important to nourish local, face-to-face, long-term community, even now when a “tweet” can go viral around the world in an instant of time?

¹⁷ Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html

¹⁸ Edgardo Lander. *The Green Economy: The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute. December 2011. p. 6

Who is listening to the cry of the Earth?

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Buddhist monk, was once asked what we need to do to save our world. “What we most need to do,” he replied, “is to hear within us the sounds of the Earth crying.”

In our time, a haunting, compelling cry is rising from every corner of the Earth. The cry comes from neighbourhoods, regions, islands and whole peoples suffering from polluted water, extremes of temperature, rising oceans, disastrous storms, droughts or floods and the degradation of forests, vegetation and soil. The cry is heard by many people as the human family peers nervously ahead in this young and stormy century. Scientists are often the first to speak, from individual researchers to international committees of scientists, compiling the results of linked studies done on many continents.



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Urgent words are coming from thousands of non-governmental organizations, big and small, who are fighting in many locations for a greener, more careful and more just economy. Crucial words are coming from religious voices and Indigenous leaders, speaking in the language of various faiths.

These voices are not new. In 1990, 24 distinguished scientists asked spiritual leaders to join them in a public declaration, *Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion*. They understood the need for the help of religion in dealing with a problem of such magnitude and complexity. Their hope was to restore in our common consciousness a sense of the sacredness of nature, so that the biosphere would be treated with more care and respect.

They wrote: “We are now threatened by self-inflicted, swiftly moving environmental alterations about whose long-term biological and ecological consequences we are still painfully ignorant – depletions of the protective ozone layer; a global warming unprecedented in the last 150 millennia; the obliteration of an acre of forest every second; the rapid-fire extinction of species; and the

prospect of nuclear war that would put at risk most of the populations of the Earth. ... We are close to committing – many would argue we are already committing – what in religious language is sometimes called Crimes against Creation.”¹⁹

As the prophet Isaiah put it many centuries ago: “The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.”²⁰

Yes, there is much speaking. But who is truly listening to this cry of the Earth?

¹⁹ National Religious Partnership for the Environment. *Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion*. Global Forum. Moscow. 1990. See also Carl Sagan. *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium*. New York, NY: Random House. 1997. Pages 143-145.

²⁰ Isaiah 24: 4-6

Mining harmful to land, water and human health

Steps to address social and environmental problems arising from the operation of the San Martin Mine in Honduras have been inadequate, according to a 2013 report by the Institute for Environmental Rights (IDAMHO). It asserts that the mining project caused social conflict, criminalization and persecution of environmentalists.

IDAMHO contends that the mine used massive quantities of water a day, leaving communities without adequate water supply. It reports that over a five-year period, the people of San José de Palo Ralo drank water from a source contaminated with cyanide.

The organization is urging the government and mining company GoldCorp, with headquarters in Canada, to properly compensate injured mine workers and people adversely affected by the mine. GoldCorp says it set up a foundation that is establishing a hotel, nature area, and athletic fields in the area. Locals criticize it as “greenwashing.”

Juliana Turqui, an Oxfam program officer, observes: “The study is important because it is the first on the closing of an open-pit mine in the region. This evidence gives us economic, social, environmental, and health facts on the consequences of the mining activity, gathered from analysis of official documents as well as the voice of the people who live in the three municipalities in the Siria valley.”

Source: www.oxfamamerica.org

Listening with ‘dull ears’

The problem isn’t that we haven’t heard all about the Earth-wide ecological crisis. It’s that, all too often, the news falls on dull ears. The response is often contentious, contradictory, skeptical or passive.

Resistance to the frightening news about the environment is understandable because the new ecological analysis challenges all of us to break habits that are powerful and entrenched. Corporate and financial leaders are boxed into a competitive race where there is no let-up from their system’s demand for financial growth, for more, for getting there first, for staying focussed on the bottom line.

Political leaders hear environmental activists and worried voters, but they fear being judged on problems that seem more immediate: debt, unemployment, infrastructure decay, the need to compete with other jurisdictions for investment, the tension between maintaining needed social programs and offering an investor-friendly tax environment. Facing such a hail of demands, where can they find time and wisdom to consider a revolution in how the world economy should relate to this planet’s natural systems?

And we ordinary citizens can all too easily settle for a dazed life as mere consumers. We like our comforts. The prospect of living a more careful, decisive, environmentally alert life gives some of us a bad headache.

To date, after several intense international conferences on ecology, world leaders remain unable to reach a binding agreement on a workable global plan of action to prevent catastrophic climate change. At Copenhagen in 2009, the long-time polluters could not agree with the new polluters among the “emerging” countries, led by China. Poor countries still struggling with hunger and deprivation were largely kept on the margins of the negotiations.

Nevertheless, government negotiators did agree that we cannot let global temperatures rise by more than 2 degrees Celsius without incurring staggering negative consequences. At least we have officially agreed that there is a problem!

Who is listening to the cry of the Earth?

What is the heart of the problem?

One way to sum it up is to look at our crisis as an energy problem. In brief, on Earth all our energy comes from the sun. We experience its heat each day and we transform only a small part of that sunshine into electricity and other types of energy to sustain and enrich human and other forms of life.

Most of the energy we use comes from fossil fuels. Nature has stored vast amounts of sun-energy in the earth through the decomposition of ancient forests and other vegetation which can now be taken out of the ground in the form of oil, gas and coal.

Oil has become the central source of power for transportation by air, sea and land. Oil is used in thousands of different products, including medicine and food. In fact, oil has come to dominate our economy and our daily lives so decisively that most people cannot imagine doing without it. So the “demand value” of oil keeps increasing, giving rise to ever more costly efforts to find new sources of it ever deeper in the earth and under the oceans.

And so politicians, corporations and profit-seeking (or just comfort-seeking) citizens deny or minimize the dark side of the oil industry. The short-term returns of our oil-based economy are indeed spectacular, given the countless ways in which our technology, from the 19th century on, has invented techniques for using oil to meet human needs and wants. The longer-term consequences – polluted air, lakes and rivers and destruction of forests, vegetation and soil – are more difficult to observe, and easier to ignore.

Nevertheless, beginning steps are already being taken in many countries and cities and in the lifestyle of individuals and families. There are efforts to develop renewable sources of energy such as wind, sun, geothermal heat, biomass and hydropower. Green technology

is being promoted and developed in many quarters. Oil companies publicize their recent efforts to clean up their own waste. Some jurisdictions (for example, Saskatchewan) are spending millions to develop so-called “clean coal” technologies.

But all the while, rapidly developing countries such as India and China are using ever more oil, and very few industrialized countries have actually cut back on how much they use. So the steady increase in global warming, climate change and air pollution continues.

The ecological problem of our times demands a radical re-evaluation of how we see the entire world; it demands a different interpretation of matter and the world, a new attitude of humankind toward nature, and a new understanding of how we acquire and make use of our material goods.

Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch, Constantinople
Address to the Plenary of the European Parliament,
October 2013

Where does hope lie for the future?

On the national level, several countries, primarily in Europe, have been making progress in breaking their dependence on oil and coal by engaging nature’s renewable resources of wind and sun. To mention one shining example: one day in May 2012, Germany gave the world a gift of hope by providing almost 50% of the energy needed across the country through the use of solar panels.

Ecuador launched a remarkable initiative in 2007 when it offered to leave oil under the ground in the Yasuni National Park, one of the world’s most biologically rich areas of rainforest, if it could raise funds to compensate for half of the loss of revenue. Recent reports are discouraging as it appears that President Rafael Correa is moving

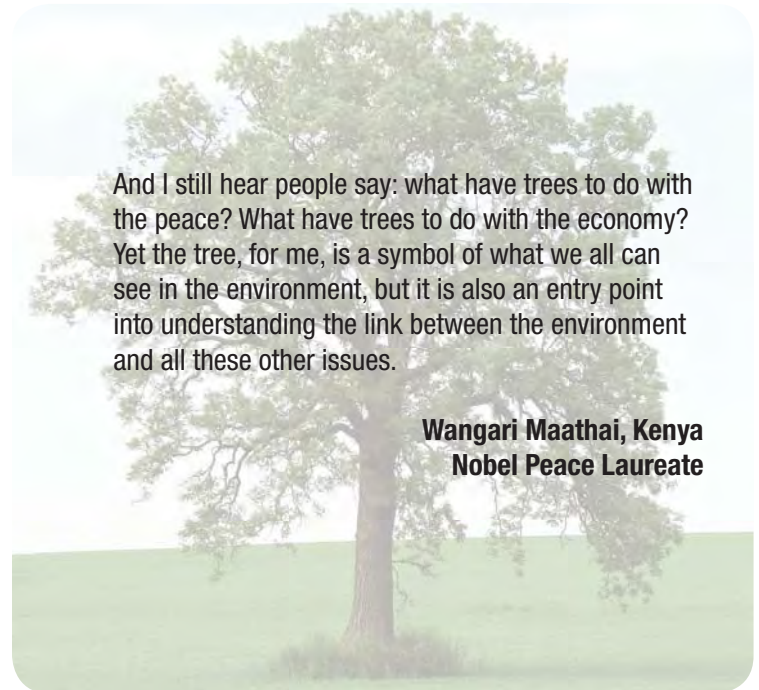
towards allowing oil extraction from the Yasuni. However the ecological movement continues its efforts, hoping to internationalize the concept of leaving oil in the soil.²¹

Canada is, sadly, not a good example. Traditionally seen as a country supportive of international efforts towards peace and order, Canada enthusiastically signed on to the Kyoto Protocol. It included an agreement to cut Canada's carbon emissions to 3% below their 1990 levels by 2012. But when the price of oil soared, the potential profits in developing the Alberta oil sands proved too big an attraction. Canada withdrew from the Protocol in December 2012 before facing fines for failing to meet its commitments. Canada has now set a target of reaching 17% below its 2005 level of emissions by 2020 (the equivalent to 2.5% above its 1990 level). Given that extracting bitumen from the oil sands generates three to five times more greenhouse gases (by volume) than conventional oil extraction, it is highly unlikely that Canada will meet even this unpretentious target.

In 10 years, Canadians have taken much more than the Spanish took in two centuries.

Rurik Hernandez, Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining

The Conference Board of Canada ranks this country 15th out of 17 richer countries when measured on items that reflect ecological responsibility.²² Canadians generate more waste per capita than any other country and Canada is one of the world's largest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases. Canada's diminished reputation as a progressive country overshadows the hundreds of exemplary provincial, city, local and non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives being taken to reduce Canada's carbon footprint.



And I still hear people say: what have trees to do with the peace? What have trees to do with the economy? Yet the tree, for me, is a symbol of what we all can see in the environment, but it is also an entry point into understanding the link between the environment and all these other issues.

**Wangari Maathai, Kenya
Nobel Peace Laureate**

The people lead the way

It appears that our best hope for sparking substantial change lies at the level of civil society. Poll after poll shows that the people are ahead of their governments on the issue of ecology, while governments struggle with shorter-term issues and cling to established sources of revenue.

What is required is a conversion, a change of mindset of how one looks at the world. We need those changed minds to grow and spread from one person to another, and we need vital democratic community groupings to take action at all levels of society.

This is the message that dozens of national and international non-governmental organizations are preaching as they offer creative alternatives to our present development model. Many churches and inter-church organizations have taken seriously the need for a new vision of how

²¹ See "Project to leave oil in ground under Yasuni park reaches \$300m." *The Guardian Newspaper*. November 23, 2012.

²² See <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/environment.aspx>.

Who is listening to the cry of the Earth?



John McCarthy si

the human-made economic system should relate to the natural biosphere on which the whole human family depends.

The World Council of Churches has been hosting conferences on every continent through its Poverty, Wealth and Ecology Project. In Canada, churches are working ecumenically through KAIROS in producing leading-edge analysis and research on climate justice.²³ The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace has a long history of engagement with ecological issues in Canada and internationally.

A new book by Jeremy Rifkin is one example of hopeful new thinking.²⁴ He explores how internet technology and renewable energy are merging in ways that could create a powerful “Third Industrial Revolution.”

Rifkin asks us to imagine hundreds of millions of people producing their own energy in their homes, offices and factories and sharing it with each other in an “energy grid,” just as we now create and share information with each other on the internet. He sees the Third Revolution creating thousands of businesses and millions of jobs. He hopes it could usher in a fundamental reordering of human relations – from hierarchical power to lateral power – that will impact the way we do commerce, govern society, educate our children and engage in civic life.

The European Parliament and cities such as Rome and San Antonio, Texas, have plans to implement elements of Rifkin’s model.

There can never be world peace as long as you make war against Mother Earth. To make war against Mother Earth is to destroy and corrupt, to kill, to poison. When we do that, we will not have peace. The first peace comes with your mother, Mother Earth.

**Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan
Onondaga Nation**

The Earth will take care of us

What is common to the many projects proposed or implemented is that they require serious institutional change, made possible by what Partha Chatterjee called “a decolonized imagination.”²⁵ But institutional change will not benefit everyone unless it is embedded in the context of social justice and strong, respectful community. To use religious terms: the natural environment is God’s good creation. It will respond generously to human effort when its inhabitants are living by the Creator’s fundamental law of life: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

From Genesis to Revelation, biblical images have reminded us that the Earth rejoices to take care of us when we take care of each other, especially when we “defend the cause of the poor ... and give deliverance to the needy.” It is then that “the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness” and “people blossom in the cities like the grass in the fields.”²⁶

²³ See John Dillon. *Time to Refocus our Approach to Climate Change*. Policy Briefing Paper No. 35 Toronto, ON: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. March 2013.

²⁴ Jeremy Rifkin. *The Third Industrial Revolution: How Lateral Power Is Transforming Energy, the Economy, and the World*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013.

²⁵ In *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*, Partha Chatterjee states that his “project ... is to claim for us, the once colonized, our freedom of imagination.” New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 2010. See www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2010/08/nation-and-imagination.html

²⁶ Psalm 72: 4, 16.

On the other hand, those who live like Cain, letting jealousy and anger lead to fratricidal action, will receive diminishing returns from the natural environment. “Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. ... When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”²⁷

If you read chapter 25 of the Book of Leviticus with sympathy and imagination, you can see how the writer’s concern for those who depend on the land is matched by concern for the land itself. Sabbath rest, communal feasts and sabbatical years are mandatory for people – but for biblical Israel, the land has similar needs and rights. Now, we tend to forget that letting the earth rest from ploughing and sowing every seventh year was also a religious duty.

And once in every generation, every fiftieth year, the land must be free of human interference: “You shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall

eat only what the field itself produces.” Trust that nature, treated with reverence as God’s property, will be generous to humans when we respect its renewing rhythms. Leave your pragmatism aside for a while, and learn again to watch and wonder and be grateful, on the bosom of the Earth that you did not invent or design.

The idea of Sabbath every week, and the even more dramatic idea of a Jubilee year in every generation, is richly suggestive. It tells us that true care for the natural environment involves a way of life that is attentive, restrained, trusting, communal and contemplative.

Our security does not depend on getting every ounce we can get out of the land and its resources. Our security is deep-rooted in the mysterious fact that the whole Earth belongs to One who loves all of us. We can learn the ways of that One – and in doing so, we will learn how to be better Earth-keepers, and better neighbours for each other.

And there will be peace.

Text and photo by Luke Hansen SJ
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Multinational mining companies are increasingly exploiting land that *campesinos* in Honduras have lived on and farmed for decades. The realities described in the box on page 26, are found in many other parts of the country. Speaking of his village in northern Honduras, Enrique Castillo said, “*We have been threatened because we have defended the poorest people, the land and the water.*” On February 13, 2013, villagers stretched a chain in front of his house to send a message to the mining companies: we are not selling; stay away from our land. The next day, the police arrived, shot down the chain, asked for their names and promised to return.

²⁷ Genesis 4: 10-12.

Who is listening to the cry of the Earth?

Share your insights

1. How do you deal with the conflicting attitudes about care of the environment that you hear or read about in daily life? What sources of information on issues like global warming do you find most trustworthy?
2. Most Canadians today live in big cities, surrounded by technology and advertising. In those conditions, how can people learn to be attentive to nature and take care of it?
3. Ask someone in the group to read aloud Psalm 104, a hymn of praise to God the Creator. Have you ever felt the way the author of this hymn feels? Would we, as stewards of the Earth, make better decisions if we were conscious of a Creator who delights in the abundance and variety of natural life on Earth?

Inequality – dare we talk about it?

Mitt Romney, the unsuccessful Republican candidate in the 2012 U.S. presidential election, offered a word of advice about discretion in public discourse: “Inequality is the kind of thing that should be discussed quietly and privately.”

Billionaire investor Warren Buffet is a little more brash about these delicate matters. He admits there has been class warfare going on for the past 20 years or so, and guess what? “My class won,” he summed up.

Needless to say, other voices are speaking more seriously about the growing gap between rich and poor – or rather, between the rich and everyone else. Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz²⁸ believes that inequality is divisive and a serious threat to democracy. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett claim that one common factor links the healthiest and happiest societies – the degree of equality among their members:

“Greater equality seems to improve the real quality of life for the vast majority of the population. It improves the quality of social relations and dramatically reduces the scale of health and social problems in societies. ... To make further improvements in the real quality of our lives, we need to shift our attention from material standards as driven by consumerism to improving the quality of social relations. ... The evidence suggests we can achieve this by reducing the material differences between us.”²⁹

Canadian economist Armine Yalnizyan argues that Canada’s 30-year experiment with trickle-down economics always was a hollow promise and has turned out to be a costly experiment. “After the mid-1990s, Canada’s economy grew at the strongest, most sustained pace seen since the 1960s, but the lion’s share of income gains was concentrated in the hands of the richest 1%, who also enjoyed massive tax cuts.”³⁰

We have constructed a system we can’t control. It imposes itself on us, and we become its slaves and victims. We have created a society in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer and in which we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth. In my mind I see a group of chickens in a cage disputing over a few seeds of grain, unaware that in a few hours they will all be killed.

**Thich Nhat Hanh,
Zen Buddhist monk**

The 2008 financial/economic crisis dragged inequality into the open for everyone to see. Taxpayers saw governments bailing out banks with hundreds of billions of dollars (remember “too big to fail”?) when those same banks had just played a major role in causing the crisis. Rather belatedly, governments spent much smaller funds to stimulate the economy and create employment.

It is no secret that the gap between rich and poor, especially between the very rich and most of us, has grown rapidly in recent years. If you believe in the wisdom of the “invisible hand” of the free market, you might conclude that the contribution to society by those who took home almost a third of all growth in incomes from 1998 to 2007 increased dramatically in those years.³¹

On the other hand, since the income of most workers has not been rising, it must mean that their contribution doesn’t open up the future for society and can safely be ignored. Yet, we know that such conclusions are blatantly unfair and, in the longer run, not true even in economic terms.

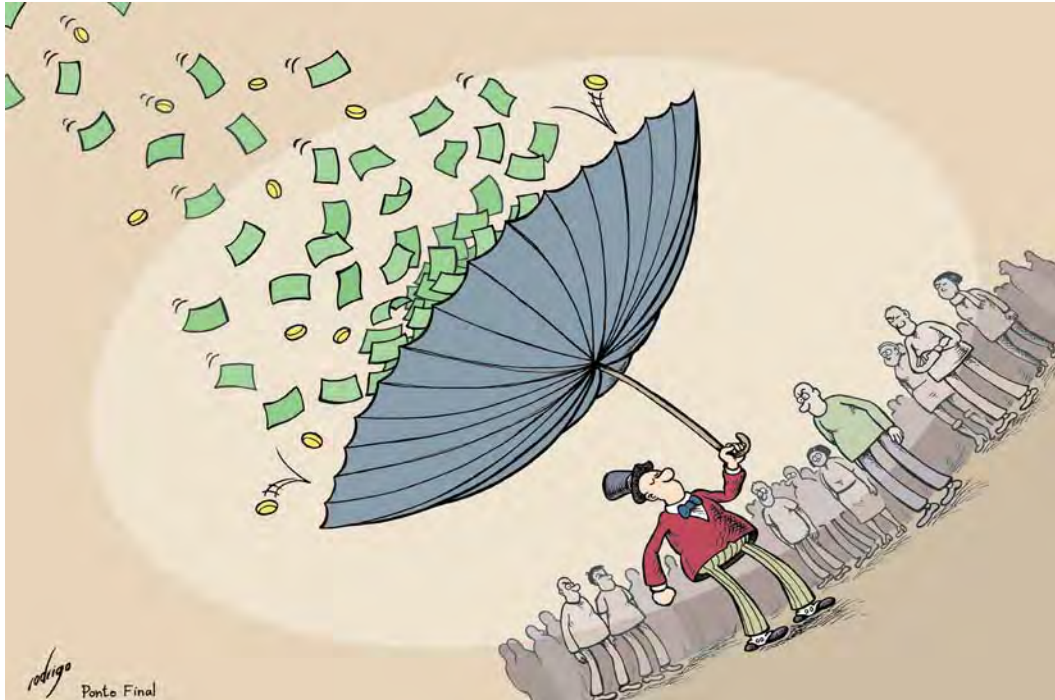
When “ordinary people” take a hard look at the big picture, they respond with anger. That’s why public protests such as “Occupy Wall Street” struck such a loud international chord, and why slogans such as “The rich and the rest” and “The 1% and the 99%” so quickly found their way into common language.

²⁸ Joseph Stiglitz. *The Price of Inequality – How today’s divided society endangers our future*. W.W. Norton 2012

²⁹ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York NY. Bloomsbury Press. Reprint edition, 2011.

³⁰ Armine Yalnizyan. *The Rise of the Richest 1%*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. December 2010.

³¹ Conference Board of Canada. “Canadian Income Inequality.” At <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/hot-topics/caninequality.aspx>.



Rodrigo de Matos / www.rodrigocartoon.com

For a couple of decades after the Second World War, the income gap (or the income-and-services gap) was shrinking in most Western societies. Why is the pattern so different in the past couple of decades?

With financial globalization, inequality in income spread quickly not only in Europe and North America, but also in developing countries such as Brazil and South Africa. China and the U.S. have the greatest inequality, but the gap has been growing in Canada as well. The richer a person, the better it got. Since 1970, the richest 1% saw their income doubled; for the richest .01%, income tripled. And the richest .001% (that's about 2,500 people), found their income quintupled since the late 1970s. This is the widest gap in incomes in Canadian history.

How did inequality become the 'new normal'?

There is an ongoing battle of ideas, or ideologies, between those who believe in smaller governments and freer markets and those who believe that an indispensable role of government is to regulate markets for the common good and to provide vigorously for public production of public goods. Who wins in such a battle? It depends in large part on who has the most power to frame public questions in ways that will be believed by a majority of the people.

Presently, corporations seem to have the power and abundant means. Their well-honed advertising skills work brilliantly in the mass media. And in political back rooms and pre-election policy tweaking, corporate lobbyists are highly skilled in making politicians – in and out of office – believe their view is right. Or if not exactly “right,” at least the promoters of the status quo can argue that to change it, if that were even possible, would be very costly for them and for us.

In Canada, after World War II, there was a widely felt conviction that “we’re all in this together.” Economic growth was accompanied by creative

Inequality – dare we talk about it?



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social reforms in education, health, pensions, minimum wages and a strengthening of trade unions. Inequality of income dropped substantially. Governments of the day used the tools at their disposal to facilitate fuller employment, spending on infrastructure such as roads, bridges and other public works, as well as by making education and skills training more accessible to more people.

But in the 1970s, beginning in the UK and U.S., the ideology of free markets returned with a vengeance. Weaker regulation of markets was seen as true progress and almost immediately, greater inequality in income returned. Globalization of the financial economy favoured corporations over both governments and labour. Corporations could threaten to move their business abroad or outsource production to regions where labour was far cheaper, regulations fewer and unions absent or weak. Governments, eager to attract foreign investments, felt forced to look for more labour "flexibility" – lower wages, less job security, fewer regulations on working conditions, not to mention weakening environmental protections.

How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away, while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. ... Until inequality and exclusion in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence.

**Pope Francis: Apostolic Exhortation,
The Joy of the Gospel. 53, 59**

The truth is that there is no such thing as "free" markets.

Those who control large pools of capital shape the markets through lending practices, currency manipulation, control of mass media and in countless other ways. Governments try to shape markets through legislation on conditions of work, minimum wages, rights of unions, tax policies and social programs, and through subsidies and exceptions for corporations and preferential tax treatment for investors.



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When governments feel keenly their reliance on the investing classes, tax policy tends to develop a bias in favour of the controllers of wealth. Income tax in Canada is no longer strongly progressive, and estate tax is largely ineffective. The government continues to keep corporate taxes low on the assumption that corporations automatically invest in the economy.

But that investment isn't so automatic. In recent years, we have heard some policy leaders chiding corporate leaders for sitting on the profits they have made from the reviving, "stimulated" economy, instead of investing to create jobs while unemployment is dangerously high.

Public protests about lack of economic fairness are a sign of the times, and perhaps a portent of a re-awakening of a democratic instinct. Joseph Stiglitz is right: inequality is destructive of the trust and community that a country needs if it is to remain democratic. There are limits to people's patience in the face of the reality that, in hard economic times, wealthy people have a fat kitty to sustain them, while the unemployed are only a cheque ahead of not putting food on the table.

Inequality is bad for the environment

In a few crucial ways, there are links between the problem of gross income inequality and the ecological crisis that is facing the world. United Nations conferences on climate change have shown that shared, legally binding decision-making on steps to avoid catastrophic climate change is nearly impossible when living conditions are as starkly different as is now the case between the global South and the global North.

Yet the problem of human-caused global warming cries out for international planning and internationally coordinated action.

Some first steps have been repeatedly proposed that could provide resources for a global effort to prevent catastrophic climate change and encourage healthy economic development where it is most needed.

One proposal would introduce a tax on industries based on how much their activities add to the problem of greenhouse gasses in the Earth's atmosphere. For short, that proposal is referred to as a "universal carbon tax."³²

An earlier idea was the "Tobin tax," named after the Nobel laureate economist who first proposed

³² Eberhard Rhein. "Humanity Needs a Universal Carbon Tax." September 24, 2009. <http://rhein.blogactiv.eu/2009/09/24/humanity-needs-a-universal-carbon-tax/>

Inequality – dare we talk about it?

it. Today, that idea has broadened its scope and is referred to as a global Financial Transactions Tax (FTT). It is a very small tax on financial market transactions such as equity, bond, derivative or foreign exchange trades. (See box.)

Prominent economists advocate a Financial Transactions Tax as one way to cool down excessive speculation in financial markets, a principal cause of the economic crisis.³³

However, acceptance of a universal carbon tax or a tax on financial transactions – both of which could contribute significantly to environmental stewardship and to income redistribution – is only a remote possibility at present. The shared understanding of the dangers/opportunities we face has not yet grown strong enough; the political courage to act for the global common good has not yet come of age.

The growing rich-poor gap in today's world is recognized as a serious problem by many economists, political leaders, observers of world-wide trends in health and disease, and by environmentalists eager for international action on the global climate challenge. But long before these the 21st century dangers and options began to be debated, religious thinkers from many traditions have been insisting that the gap between excessive wealth and debilitating poverty is a dangerous chasm that must be crossed for moral and spiritual reasons.

Inequality is a spiritual problem

Many of the world's great religions offer serious personal and communal disciplines that have the effect of taming greed, encouraging solidarity and redistributing income. Biblical revelation, which is at the root of faith for Jews and for Christians, insists on the spiritual danger of unshared wealth.

We Christians inherit faith in a God who “casts down the mighty from their thrones, and raises up the lowly. He fills the hungry with good things, and the rich he sends empty away.”

The 'Robin Hood' Tax

The 'Robin Hood' tax (or Financial Transactions Tax) is a tiny tax that could be used to tackle some of the major problems of our time.

By taking as little as .05% from international banking transactions, hundreds of billions of dollars could be raised, helping to curb some of the speculative activities of day traders whose practices exacerbated the financial crisis.

It would also provide the means to help countries get their economies back on track and significantly kick-start a process to fight global poverty and climate change.

www.robinhoodtax.ca

Who said that? Why, that well-known revolutionary, Mary of Nazareth, shortly after she became pregnant with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. In her ecstatic psalm which we call the “Magnificat,” the mother of Jesus sums up the inspired hope of the Hebrew Scriptures that God, the conqueror of evil, will close the rich-poor gap which is like a wound in the body of the world (Luke 1: 46-55).

In the Gospels, the other great herald of the coming of Jesus is John the Baptist. This is what John recommended as he urged people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah (Luke 3: 10-11): “When all the people asked him, ‘What must we do (to produce the fruits of repentance)?’ John answered, ‘If anyone has two tunics he must share with the person who has none, and the person with something to eat must do the same.’”

Even more startling for conventional wisdom is the powerful movement of sharing that transformed the lives of the first Christian converts after Pentecost, in Jerusalem. A few famous verses in the Acts of the Apostles describe the effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit:

³³ John Dillon. “An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Adopt a Financial Transactions Tax.” Policy Briefing Paper No. 24. Toronto, ON: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. May 2010.

“The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common. The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and they were all given great respect. None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from them to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any members who might be in need” (Acts 4: 32-35).

All these responses were “charismatic,” that is, a free response to a specific grace. They were not enforced by a state authority or even by an ecclesial one. Indeed, if human beings tried to enforce by legislation a redistribution as radical as the sharing described in Acts, it’s a safe bet that more harm than good would result. As St. Paul said pithily, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians: 3:17). Radical generosity should be free, not forced.

Community for the common good

Nevertheless, it is the consistent witness of Scripture that the love of neighbour which our God has always insisted on does include an ongoing willingness to meet the economic needs of those who are in want.

And as the letter of James makes forcefully clear, the sharing of material goods is for the sake of creating a community of mutual respect, where those who were born disadvantaged know and feel that they are as precious to God, and as valued within the community, as the daughters and sons of privilege (James 2: 1-17).

“Equality” is a rather pale word for the burning love that God’s Spirit plants in human hearts, kindled from the heart of Christ. “Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was; he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty,” writes Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (8: 9). Yes, in its fullest expression, the divinely inspired “equalization” St. Paul describes leads to the Cross – and also to the Resurrection (Philippians 2: 1-11).

Indeed, such generous love rarely reaches the fullness of its transforming potential, whether in the church or outside of it. But the seedlings of love of neighbour are abundant. They spring up in surprising ways: in faith-based communities, but also in our common human life. In ordinary human society, a respectful preference for promoting legal and economic equality can truly be a seedling with roots in God’s saving will.

Christians would be wise to notice, cherish, and promote the signs of equality and sharing that can grow into courageous, loving service of the common good.

Share your insights

1. Most Canadians view our public universal health care system as an outstanding example of rich-poor sharing. Do you? Why do you think we can have such a public system in Canada while the U.S. seems unable to achieve it?
2. “There is no such thing as a ‘free market.’” Do you agree, or disagree? In your own experience, have you been hurt by unrestrained market forces? On the other hand, has your livelihood been damaged by laws or regulations that prevented you from doing something that would have had good results?
3. How can you promote brotherly/sisterly equality, for the good of all? Would policies such as these result in greater equality in Canadian society?
 - a) Improve access to good education, skill training and apprenticeships
 - b) Support First Nations schooling with resources fully equal to provincially funded schools.
 - c) Restore more countervailing power to trade unions so that they are in a stronger position to bargain effectively with large corporations.

Canada – an energy superpower! Dream or nightmare?

Energy is intimately related to economic growth and to the kinds of technology people are able to use in the “energy regime” in which they live. In fact, at any given time, the shape or source of energy determines what humans can or cannot achieve in terms of production and production-related technology.

In earlier economies, when human muscle was still the major available source of energy, slavery was massively important. If you were aiming at surplus production for the sake of trade, or if your royal court needed to indulge in conspicuous consumption for political reasons, you probably needed a hefty supply of slaves.

Oil servitude is so prevalent that it is no more visible to us than the abuses of human slaves were to Roman slaveholders.

Andrew Nikiforuk

Historically, when a new “energy regime” replaces an older one, dramatic social changes happen. Sometimes there is a good-news dimension to such changes as, for example, when new forms of mechanization made it easier for the young United States of America to see that it could thrive economically without clinging to the evil of slavery.

When entrepreneurs in the 18th century learned how to harness the energy of steam, fired by coal or wood, steam-powered engines promptly revolutionized transportation and manufacturing. Historians call that the First Industrial Revolution. Then came electricity; and soon afterwards, oil and gas became indispensable for our land, water and air transportation as well as for lighting and heating. We moved into high gear.

Nevertheless, Andrew Nikiforuk argues that we still behave like slaveholders in the way we use energy: “Oil servitude is so prevalent that it is no more visible to us than the abuses of human slaves were to Roman slaveholders.”³⁴ Writing in *The Tyee*, he observes: “Given that the average Canadian now consumes 24.7 barrels

of oil a year, ... every citizen employs about 204 virtual slaves. That’s a spectacular amount of power for any mortal to wield and much more than any Roman or Egyptian household ever commanded. Or five times more than average 19th century U.S. plantation owners.”³⁵

Usually we think about energy-enabled changes as facts of history, important but purely secular. So how do such mundane things as energy and technology come to be questions of conscience for people of faith?

Anything as humanly important as the energy on which our world relies for its daily work has to be spiritually important. The questions around even the peaceful uses of nuclear power, for example, pose an issue of conscience for many of us. And the burning questions around our massive dependence on oil, now that we know about greenhouse gases and climate change, are even more serious.

When our conscience is troubled, we who are believers seek the guidance of God, out of whose wisdom the whole of creation arose in the beginning. Seeking God’s guidance on questions of personal morality is a familiar idea for most religious people. It is equally important when the troublesome issue is a matter of social conscience rather than of individual morality.

Now in the people that were meant to be green there is no more life of any kind. There is only shrivelled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples. The Earth should not be injured! The Earth must not be destroyed!”

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

We seek God’s light in many ways: in careful, honest scientific research; in the lessons learned from human experience both recent and historic; and in a prayerful return to the sources from which the Christian community hopes to draw inspired teaching – including, of course, sacred Scripture.

³⁴ Andrew Nikiforuk. *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude*. Greystone Books; Vancouver, BC. 2012.

³⁵ See <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2011/05/05/EnergySlaves/>

A story of chariots, horses and being an energy superpower

The Bible has some poignant hints about different kinds of energy and their effects in the human community. One colourful example is the issue of horsepower – more precisely, the use of war horses and the iron chariots they could bring into battle. The social conscience question here was: Should God’s people copy imperial Egypt’s military culture, importing horses and chariots of war and training elite chariot teams?

King Solomon, who consistently imitated the pagan emperors of his time, thought war horses were a great idea. Among his dazzling export/import triumphs (read about them in 1 Kings: 9), we learn that he built whole cities for his horses and the expert teams that looked after them. After all, horses and chariots were the high-tech weaponry of his day.



Kuban Group Vase Painters (fl. 410-400 BCE. attributed to: Panathenaic amphora with chariot group, driven by a charioteer dressed in white robes.

Solomon became the region’s dominant arms trader: “Solomon’s import of horses was from Egypt and Kue ... a chariot could be imported from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver, and a horse for 150; so through the king’s traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram,” notes the Book of Kings.³⁶ But Solomon kept the lion’s share

for himself. One description of Solomon’s “glory” notes that he had 40,000 stalls of horses and 12,000 horsemen.³⁷

Can you imagine the maintenance costs? No wonder Solomon had to institute a whole new system of agricultural taxation. But the majority of Israel’s tribes found that system so burdensome that they broke away from the House of David as soon as Solomon’s son Rehoboam tried to continue the regime. Having been brought up in Solomonic luxury, Rehoboam was blind to the vision of brotherly equality that was normative in Israel’s early economy, before the nation became a monarchy. As a result, he was tone-deaf to what the farmer-protesters were trying to tell him. He couldn’t lead the process to a reconciliation and the kingdom split apart.³⁸

Solomon never did grasp why God led His people out of Egypt to live a life unlike that imperial model. It was the prophets who understood why Egypt’s power games and power tools would draw Israel away from what God was teaching them about covenant living. For the prophet Hosea, the people’s promise “not to ride upon horses” was inseparable from their promise not to revert to paganism and idolatry.³⁹

Do you remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem, shortly before his death? On the day that we recall every Palm Sunday, Jesus “found a young donkey and mounted it – as Scripture says: Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming mounted on the colt of a donkey.” The Scripture that John’s gospel is recalling is from the prophet Zechariah, who rejoices that this humble king “will banish chariots from Ephraim and horses from Jerusalem” as part of his refusal of pursuing success that was based on war-making.⁴⁰

Truly we are not the first generation of believers who have had to think hard in the light of faith about the forms and sources of the energy on which we allow ourselves to become dependent.

³⁶ 1 Kings 10: 28, 29.

³⁷ 1 Kings 4: 26.

³⁸ 1 Kings: 12.

³⁹ Read Hosea’s beautiful poem in chapter 14 as he hungers for Israel’s conversion.

⁴⁰ John 12:15 and Zechariah 9: 9.

Canada – an energy superpower! Dream or nightmare?

The deadly consequences of today's 'energy regime'

In our time, oil has come to dominate economies and lifestyles. The explosion of modes of transportation is the most obvious dimension of the primacy of oil. But oil-based products as diverse as plastics, construction materials and chemicals are also embedded in our daily lives. From the moment we start our day, we depend on oil – for our toothbrush, the packaging of our cereal, the warmth of our house and how we get to work.

Many voices are raised today to cry out about the dangers built into the oil-based technology/economy that now dominates the world. As rapidly-developing countries such as China and India search the world for oil, the increased demand has helped to push the price of oil five times higher than it was a decade ago. Other factors are also at work: finite supplies of conventional oil, more costly unconventional substitutes, cartel-like behaviour by both OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the transnational corporations – not to mention speculation in oil markets.

Higher demand and higher prices make it profitable for corporations to claw and dig ever deeper for deposits that used to be uneconomical to develop. Now the costly, controversial, water-hungry process of separating oil from sand will potentially add billions of barrels of oil from Canada and Venezuela to the global economy, and impact the global environment.

Everyone knows there is a very dark side to this brilliant development. Researchers, activists and social thinkers are contributing to a chorus of warning. But most countries – especially oil producers – are still not willing to confront the issue in all its urgency even though our present way of life is simply not sustainable.

Our fossil-fuel based economy and its accompanying lifestyles are at a crossroads. Will we decide to leave in the ground, or under the sea, oil (and coal) whose extraction would threaten precious bodies of water or

To obtain resources for which there is a market price and from which profits and royalties can be obtained, it has become necessary to access sources that are more remote, more risky and hence more costly. In so doing, ecosystem services are lost. Examples include the loss of life in the oceans when drilling for oil below the seabed goes awry, or the removal of mountaintops for open-pit coal-mining, or the creation of toxic lakes and denuded forests in tar sands operations. All of these activities involve a loss of ecosystem services from the pursuit of economic growth.

Peter Victor, Managing Without Growth: Slower By Design, Not Disaster

bio-sensitive environments, not to mention, the very air we breathe?

In 2011, glaciologists and hydrologists, convened by the Pontifical Academy of Scientists, published a sober report with a focus on what's happening to glaciers, and therefore to water and weather systems on Earth as a whole. Among their conclusions: "A sustainable future based on the continued extraction of coal, oil and gas in the 'business-as-usual-mode' will not be possible, both because of resource depletion and environmental damages – as caused, eg, by dangerous sea level rise."⁴¹

There is a stark ecological limit beyond which a humanly liveable climate could overheat and render large parts of the world inhospitable to human life. Our intense use of fossil fuels brings with it an excess of the greenhouse gases which destroy the ability of Earth's atmosphere to protect us from the sun's heat.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that on May 9, 2013: "The daily mean concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere of Mauna Loa, Hawaii, surpassed 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first time since measurements began in 1958." NOAA senior scientist Pieter Tans states: "The evidence is conclusive that the strong growth of global CO₂ emissions from the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas is driving the acceleration."⁴²

⁴¹ "Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene." A report by the Working Group commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. April 2011
⁴² See <http://research.noaa.gov>.

The complexity of reducing our 'carbon footprint'

Countries that arrived early to the Industrial Revolution have been heating and polluting the global atmosphere for many generations. To maintain and increase that booming cycle of production, transportation, trade and consumption, "rich" countries developed self-serving foreign investment and trade practices which badly hurt the traditional economies and cultures of nations which were not yet industrialized.

Out of this imbalance has emerged the concept of a massive "ecological debt" owed to poorer countries by countries that profited early from the oil-based industrial revolution. Since the global North benefited by its excessive use of fossil fuels, it is argued, it should bear the major costs involved in cutting back and repairing environmental damage. The global South should not be held back because of problems caused by the global North. This inherited imbalance is a crucial obstacle to getting agreement on how to act in the face of climate change.

Meanwhile, only a very few countries have moved substantially away from all-out dependence on oil. Canada has taken some tentative first steps – and later retreated from some of those steps, including withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol. The big, economy-changing moves have yet to be made. A crucial question among many we now face as citizens of Canada is this one: in global, environmental terms, what is the responsible way to deal with the bitumen deposits (oil sands, also called tar sands)?

The bitumen areas of Alberta constitute the second largest deposit of oil sands in the world, with potentially over 300 billion barrels of recoverable oil. Present and future plans to develop and export this resource are enormous in their scope, as is the potential of present and future damage to the environment.

The work of extracting oil from this ancient matrix illustrates well the dark side of further recovery of oil. Vast boreal forests and top soil first have to be removed – much of it on Aboriginal lands, forests and waterways. The oil sands are then crushed into granular form and mixed with hot water and a chemical such as caustic soda, which causes the bitumen to float



Photo: David Dodge, Pembina Institute

Suncor mining operation with the remaining edge of boreal forest, east of the Athabasca River, Alberta.

Canada – an energy superpower! Dream or nightmare?

to the top where it is skimmed off. It is readied for transport by pipeline, while the dirty residue is poured into huge, toxic tailings ponds. These ponds present an ongoing danger of seepage into the natural water systems.

The heating of such vast quantities of water is done by natural gas – a thousand cubic feet of gas per barrel of marketable product. The extraction and upgrading of bitumen accounts for 7.8% of all Canadian emissions of greenhouse gases.⁴³ Albertans produce three times the volume of emissions per capita compared with other regions of Canada, and six times as much as Europeans.⁴⁴

Although corporations and governments search for new technologies to reduce that awful “carbon footprint,” they are equally intent on full-scale expansion of oil sands development. UN statistics reveal that the fossil-fuel industry globally receives \$523 billion in state subsidies (compared to the \$88 billion received by the renewable energy sector).

A further impediment to at least slowing down the oil sands industry is the controversial Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement. It requires Canada, under certain conditions, such as a decision to reduce oil sands production for environmental reasons, to make available to the U.S. the same proportion of total oil supply as was exported over the previous three years – even if it meant importing oil to meet local needs.

Under Chapter 11 investment rules, foreign companies can bring claims against both federal and provincial governments if public policy or government action denies them investment or profit opportunities. “This situation has become a legal and economic battlefield, with governments too often finding that the best interests of their citizens are trumped by the ability of multinationals to make profits,” says Scott Sinclair of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.⁴⁵

We are not outside the environment; we are the environment.

Pikto’l Sa’kej Muise (Victor Muise) is a Mi’kmaq from Bay St. George on the west coast of Newfoundland. He is a traditional teacher and certified prospector, and he has been involved in his community’s fight against fracking.

“Our people have been here for a long time. We come from an oral tradition and learned our culture and knowledge by carefully listening to what our Elders and other people say. To survive within the spirit of our traditions, respect for the environment and Mother Earth, we listen, and determine the truth of what has been said by reflecting.

“I understand that the Mi’kmaq People and other Aboriginal peoples are the custodians of the land and the water. What we do to Mother Earth, we do to ourselves. We are not outside the environment; we are the environment. We learn through our teachings that we have to make decisions for the next seven generations. This principle is fundamental to our ways and how we see the world.

“Today we treat the land poorly by fracking for oil and gas. What we do to the land, we do to ourselves.”

**Excerpt from an article in *Canadian Perspectives*,
Autumn 2013, Council of Canadians**

In addition, there are difficult questions clustering around Aboriginal rights – questions that arise out of the very roots of Canada’s colonial/ imperial beginnings. Canada and its provinces have a great deal of work to do to reach a fair agreement with the First Nations whose land and way of life are protected by historic treaties. The proposed new pipelines have already raised a cloud of such questions. They are difficult issues, in ethics and in law, and they touch Canada’s very soul.

⁴³ Environment Canada data for 2011. This does not include other GHG emissions incurred through the transportation, refining and ultimate combustion of fuels made from the bitumen whether this occurs in Canada or in the U.S.

⁴⁴ Luc Bouchard, Bishop of St. Paul, Alberta. “A Pastoral Letter on The Integrity of Creation and the Athabasca Oil Sands. January 25, 2009. See <http://oilsandstruth.org/integrity-creation-and-athabasca-tar-sands>

⁴⁵ See <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/newsroom/updates/nafta-chapter-11-increasing-threat-public-good>

We need wisdom – urgently!

In recent times, a controversial source of energy is the oil and natural gas that can be freed by fracturing rock layers deep beneath the Earth's surface.⁴⁶ Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking” involves injecting huge amounts of water containing chemicals, including some known carcinogens, into rock formations.

The long-term fallout from this process is still not known – though early experience in some cases has proven a danger to underground fresh water supply. Seismologists have warned that fracking could cause earthquakes in some environments.

Yet another source of energy with enormous potential and equally enormous risks are methane hydrates.⁴⁷ Canada has confirmed reserves of methane hydrates in the Mackenzie River Delta, the Arctic Archipelago and along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Although

methane is clean burning, the risks of extraction of the “fire ice,” as the methane gas trapped in ice is sometimes called, are alarming.

Besides the challenges of even reaching these hydrates, which are formed in permafrost zones in polar regions or seafloor sediments, the resulting impact of destabilizing the seabed could have devastating consequences. Recall the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004 that caused thousands of deaths and destruction in some 11 countries.

Even more alarming is the prospect of how methane hydrate mining could affect climate change. Once methane is released from the ice in which it is trapped, it becomes a greenhouse gas that is a greater threat than carbon dioxide in causing global warming.⁴⁸

'Fracking' controversy

Beneath the boreal forest in northeastern British Columbia lies the Cordova Embayment, a recess in the coastline of an ancient ocean. The decomposed remains of prehistoric creatures 2,500 to 3,000 metres underground have become shale gas, a hydrocarbon that is driving the latest energy-industry gold rush. But before this unconventional gas is extracted from the ground, the Dene Tha' First Nation is suing the B.C. government to force the province to learn more about the impacts of a process known as hydraulic fracturing. ...

Fracking has been linked to contaminated water in Alberta and Pennsylvania and to hundreds of small earthquakes in Arkansas. Documentaries such as Academy Award-nominated *Gasland* and CBC's *Burning Water* show kitchen tap water bursting into flames. These dangers have led Quebec, Nova Scotia and France to impose moratoriums until further scientific study is completed. ...

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) supports the disclosure of chemicals but says no links have been found between fracking and drinking water contamination. Wells are drilled so deep that chemicals would have to seep up through two or more kilometres of rock to cause problems. “Before you take a punitive measure such as banning [the process], ensure that you've got it based on good science,” says Kerry Guy, CAPP's manager of natural-gas advocacy.

**Excerpts from an article by Claudia Goodine, Canadian Geographic, October 2011.
www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/oct11/fracking.asp**

⁴⁶ See “Fracking's future an illusion at best” by David Olive. *Toronto Star*. February 22, 2013.

⁴⁷ See <http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-tech/energy-production/frozen-fuel5.htm>.

⁴⁸ See John Dillon. “Arctic Melting Sounds the Alarm for Life on Earth.” KAIROS Policy Briefing Paper No. 29. December 2011.

Canada – an energy superpower! Dream or nightmare?

Methane hydrates contain more carbon than all the world's other fossil resources combined, according to United States Geological survey estimates.⁴⁹

Clearly we need to give much higher priority to research, innovation and implementation of alternative natural sources of energy – wind, sun, biomass and hydropower. Canada has these in abundance, and the electricity they can produce could significantly reduce our deep dependence on oil. We could then live more in harmony with the rhythms of nature, as is already being proven feasible in Germany and Scandinavia.

Yes, we can be an energy superpower – but not by barrelling along with fossil fuel production as if the problem of climate change, and other environmental warning signs facing our generation, were something we can put off and attend to later.

We need to seek wisdom with all seriousness. We need to change our priorities. Our generation is summoned to work towards a transformation that will take the best efforts of all of us – in scientific research, in economic planning, in political action and decision-making, and in education of consciences so that people can grasp the great ethical challenges facing our time. For believers, there is a mighty call to prayer for personal and collective wisdom that is the gift of God.

If we work faithfully on all of those levels, we will be able to see our way clearly and inclusively into an era of clean energy. As that day dawns, clinging to our overdependence on fossil fuel will seem as obsolete and unthinkable as Solomon's fleet of war chariots or the slave-sustained economies of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Share your insights

1. Do you believe that “our present way of life is not sustainable” (see page 41)? How do we live responsibly in today's “energy regime”?
2. Given the amount of carbon-based energy resources in Canada – wood, oil, gas, coal – have we become modern slave owners? Have we ourselves become enslaved by our dependence on fossil fuel energy?
3. As citizens of Canada, what should we do about the oil sands? Should we promote Canada as an “energy superpower”?

⁴⁹ Melissa C. Lott. “Methane Hydrates - bigger than shale gas, ‘game-over’ for the environment.” *Scientific American*. March 19, 2013.



NOTES:

Living well: it might take less, rather than more

When we stop to think about it, we can all marvel at the extent to which we now live in a “global village.” We are seconds away from vivid, detailed news about a catastrophe – or a sporting event – on any continent in the world.

Your sister has moved to Korea to teach English as a second language? You can speak to her whenever you want, face to face, via Skype. A surgeon in India has developed a new technique in transplant medicine? Students in Cairo can watch his next operation, live in real time. The technology of all this is awesome. And it touches every aspect of our daily lives, as we eat grapes grown in Chile on plates made in China while discussing the economic strains in the Eurozone and their affect on Canada. You get the picture!

Yes, we are more and more tightly interconnected with one another. But that in itself doesn't necessarily make us a loving family. Pope Benedict wrote *Caritas in Veritate* to help everyone reflect on the great moral and spiritual challenge of this new time. He called on us to broaden our social conscience and grow our capacity to love, so that we can develop a readiness for brotherly/sisterly living that is equal to the reality of our global connectedness. Our technology, our politics and our economics – indeed, all our institutions and laws – need to be transformed by awakened consciences so that they can function as “networks of love” in the development of genuine global community.⁵⁰

Pope Francis, on the day he was installed as the 266th Bishop of Rome, also addressed this global challenge to love. Speaking on the feast of St. Joseph, who was called to protect the young Jesus and His mother, he said: “The vocation of being a ‘protector’... means protecting all of creation It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need.

“Whenever human beings fail to live up to this responsibility ... the way is opened to destruction and hearts are hardened. ... Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”

When someone puts the global challenge to love in these attractive terms, there is something in us that trembles, but also something in us that says: “Yes, that’s true. That’s what God wants. That’s ‘the good life’ for all of us.”

But there are also things in us which put up an awful fight.

We still have time to fix this [eco-crisis] and we still have time to make it better, but really what is needed here is that the human race needs to wake up and look forward with the sense that we’ve got to change the way we live.

... Nature is not our enemy, it is our sustenance and we need it, and we need nature healthy for us to be healthy and to survive long-term, and that’s the realization we have to come to and that’s the next stage in evolution that we have to reach.

**James Cameron, Canadian-born filmmaker
(Oscar-winner for the movie, *Avatar*)**

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth)*. Rome. June 29, 2009. Nos. 5 and 32.

Encountering the limits of today's culture

The culture that we inherited from the thinkers who shaped modern Europe puts a huge emphasis on individualism. Look after Number One. My choice is right for me.

But the challenge is to see the world through the eyes of community. We need to grow into seeing the human race somewhat as parents see their family. We are social by nature; from our mother's womb we depend on community. When we're in good shape spiritually, that kind of "family life" is still difficult, but it's also a joy for us.



Our brilliant, expansionist economic system, however, doesn't broadcast that vision. It is more profitable in the so-called "free market system" to stay close to those with the most buying power. Consumerism is the most aggressively promoted part of our culture, and it "sells" an attitude of always needing something more, something new.

During the 2012 Super Bowl, corporations paid some \$3.8 million for 30-seconds of air-time to promote their products. The purpose of such enormous expenditures is to constantly create new, superficial needs, along with a hunger for more and more money to meet those needs. We get distracted – too distracted to keep our focus on the primacy of first assuring that everyone's basic needs can be met.

Living well: it might take less, rather than more

A well-indoctrinated consumer now expects instant gratification – and our dazzling technology does its best to provide it. Combined with an overload of information from our myriad channels of fast communication, we are trained into short term-thinking that can blind us to serious, long-term questions. This is particularly true of the emerging danger presented by climate change. Solutions to that enormous challenge demand a persistent focus, long-term thinking, political honesty and strong, bold action in the interests of the common good.

In spite of the unhealthy dimensions of our culture, we are never left without signs that we remain God’s children, capable by nature and by grace of generous action in faith, hope and love. When natural disasters strike, or unexpected acts of terror occur in a community, look how people pull together! Very many people then find joy in helping however they can, even in the face of potential danger to themselves. The “first responders” – firefighters, police officers, ambulance crews – become local heroes. Sometimes it doesn’t last long, but at least for a while a special kind of shared happiness shines out, even from our TV screens.

Can leaner times be good news?

For the sake of restoring health and balance in our natural environment, we need carefully to discover new limits to our use of resources. The heady days of rapid, often careless economic growth may well be over, with leaner economic times ahead.

And it just might be that the coming of leaner times is truly good news. What an opportunity for Christians to put their Gospel to work by helping everyone discover the joy that comes with being less into money and much more into people and nature!

Degrowth advocates would express the good news this way: “The downscaling of production and consumption ... not only preserves the

conditions necessary for long-term ecosystem and human survival, but also fosters living better here and now. ... Work sharing, consuming less, inventing creative ways of living together, devoting more time to art, music, family, culture and community, and voluntary simplicity are all important elements of sustainable degrowth. Here we see the similarities with the Latin American Indigenous concept of *buen vivir* which emphasizes the harmonious relation between human beings and their environment and between humans in their communities.”⁵¹

In Asia, the “social business” movement sparked by Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus is growing. The cooperative movement is finding new international energy these days.

The new abolitionists

Around the world, families and groups of individuals are walking away in ever growing numbers from petroleum and the inanimate slave culture of frantic consumption. They are exchanging quantity for quality and relearning the practical arts.

Those seeking liberty eat slowly, travel locally, plant gardens, work ethically, build communities, share tools and eschew bigness in economic and political life.

Above all, they are relearning what it means to live within their means, with grace. Like the Greeks long before them, these new abolitionists have come to understand that the indiscriminate spending of energy is mere Promethean hubris.

Unqualified power diminishes life, the only true wealth we share. By burying the chains, we can find a new livelihood and an old freedom.

**Andrew Nikiforuk. The Energy of Slaves:
Oil and the New Servitude**

⁵¹Janet Eaton. “What is degrowth?” 2012.
<http://beyondcollapse.wordpress.com/2012/08/04/what-is-degrowth-by-janet-m-eaton-august-3-2012/>

When you look for it, you can find the practical language of the business press echoing, sometimes with surprise, what Pope Benedict emphasized in *Caritas in Veritate*, namely that economic activity must foster “solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players.”(38)

Economist Jeff Rubin asks, what about re-localizing our agricultural economy, and indeed, the economy generally?⁵² That could be the beginning of a widespread rediscovery of the preciousness of land and water – and a renewed bond with nature that brings with it much more face-to-face community.

The Community Shared Agriculture movement, with its networks of co-operation between specific farmers and signed-on families in the city, could grow like – well, like a herb garden.

A movement that began in Kinsale, Ireland, and then spread to Totnes, England, in 2005 and 2006, is popularly known as “Transition Towns.” Its advocates point out that its concepts can be embraced by families, neighbourhoods – any kind of social unit. It has now grown into an international network of communities that are working to build resilience in response to concerns about fossil-fuel dependence, climate destruction and economic instability. There are 28 “official” Transition Towns in Canada (both rural and urban), with many others working toward that goal.⁵³

And let’s not forget the efforts of some local governments to introduce changes, even difficult ones, to open the way for a cleaner economy. For example, Ontario is shutting down its last coal-burning electric power plant. Ontario Power Generation, is converting the Atikokan Station to generate electricity from wood pellets sourced from sustainable forestry practices.⁵⁴

Wake up people!

The bells of mindfulness are sounding. All of us know that our beautiful green planet is in danger. Our way of walking on the Earth has a great influence on animals and plants. Yet we act as if our daily lives have nothing to do with the condition of the world.

We need a collective awakening. Most people are still sleeping. We all have a great desire to be able to live in peace and to have environmental sustainability. What most of us don’t yet have are concrete ways of making our commitment to sustainable living a reality in our daily lives. It’s time for each of us to wake up and take action in our own lives. If we awaken to our true situation, there will be a change in our collective consciousness.

**Thich Nhat Hanh,
Zen Buddhist Monk**

Ancient wisdom for our time

The joyful discovery that less financially can be more spiritually is not exclusively a Christian insight. Other faith traditions have been teaching this truth too, some of them for millennia. Jesus wouldn’t have surprised the wise people of his time when he pointed out that you can’t serve both God and money. These days, even the social sciences are noticing the lack of correlation between higher income and happiness.

Recent studies conclude that, once basic needs are satisfied, happiness tends to be undermined by competition in lifestyle matters and by other problems that come with too much consuming. When psychologist Martin Seligman was asked, “What factors really do produce happiness and wellbeing?” he replied with one word: “People!” For him, we flourish in a setting of warm and nurturing relationships, and within that context we flourish best when we are giving, not getting.⁵⁵

Capitalist economic thinking has been deeply committed to a philosophy that sees sheer individual self-interest as the key driver of

⁵² Jeff Rubin. “The End of Growth” Toronto, ON; Random House of Canada. 2012 p. 259

⁵³ See <http://transitionus.org/home> and <http://transitionus.org/stories/news-canada>.

⁵⁴ See <http://energyquest4nanticoke.ca/biomass2.htm>

⁵⁵ Martin E. P. Seligman. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York, NY: Free Press, Simon and Schuster Inc. 2011. p. 20.

Living well: it might take less, rather than more



Photo courtesy of Frances Moore-Lappé and LEISA India/www.leisaindia.org

A meeting of members of a village level association of the poor in Andhra Pradesh, India. They are some of the 5,000 very small-scale women farmers of the Deccan Development Society. They are a cooperative and they have worked together to improve their lives, as well as planting over a million trees, recognizing that these forests provide fodder, fruits, fuel and timber.

economic success. But many leaders in business are becoming eloquent about the wisdom of embracing new restraints for the sake of the common good, especially the ecological common good. “Vision 2050: The New Agenda for Business” is a strategy proposal drafted by the CEOs of the some of the world’s largest multinational corporations for the World Council on Sustainable Development. It states:

“Vision 2050 is not only about economic development and sustainability challenges for business. It suggests governments and civil society must create a different view of the future, one where economic growth has been decoupled from ecosystem destruction and material construction, and recoupled with sustainable development and societal well being.”⁵⁶

There is also a whole new confidence these days among some Indigenous leaders, world-wide. As ideas which are new to capitalism – like the careful embrace of limits for the sake of the common good, like seeing community and solidarity as the healthiest and happiest forces in our earthly life – some voices from small and ancient peoples have good reason to say, “We told you so!”

In Canada, some of those voices can be heard in the Idle No More movement. In South America, there is a whole new/old understanding of “development” being promoted first of all by Indigenous leaders, and echoed by quite a few church people and politicians. *Buen vivir* – meaning “to live well” – insists that the good life begins with care for community, harmony with nature, deliberate simplicity and steady clarity about core values. Not consumerism.

To quote Jeff Rubin once more: “We can still shape the future we want, but only if we are willing to relinquish the past we’ve known. As the boundaries of a finite world continue to close in on us, our challenge is to learn that making do with less is better than always wanting more”.⁵⁷

Hard times ahead can become joyful times of rediscovery. If we follow wisdom and draw strength from God’s world-embracing grace, today’s anxious economic struggles could become the birth-pangs of an era with more community, more justice and more peaceful joy.

⁵⁶ Joseph K. Ingram. “Global Growth, the Quality of Growth, and the Critical Need for a New Paradigm.” In *International Development in a Changing World: Canadian and Global Perspectives on Growth, Aid and Global Governance*. Ottawa, ON: The North-North South Institute. 2013. P. 17

⁵⁷ Jeff Rubin. *ibid*

***Buen vivir*: the social philosophy inspiring movements in South America**

Ecuador is building on its Indigenous past by incorporating the concept of *sumak kawsay* into its approach to development. Rooted in the cosmovisión (or worldview) of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, *sumak kawsay* – or *buen vivir*, to give it its Spanish name – describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive. A far cry from the market-is-king model of capitalism, it inspired the recently revised Ecuadorian constitution, which now reads: “We ... hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living.”

In English, *buen vivir* loosely translates as “good living” or “well living,” although neither term sits well with Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on the subject. Both are too close to Western notions of wellbeing or welfare, he says: “These are not equivalents at all. With *buen vivir*, the subject of wellbeing is not [about the] individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environmental situation.” ...

Gudynas is at pains to point out that *buen vivir* owes as much to political philosophy as it does to Indigenous worldviews. “It is equally influenced by western critiques [of capitalism] over the last 30 years, especially from the field of feminist thought and environmentalism,” he explains. “It certainly doesn’t require a return to some sort of indigenous, pre-Colombian past.”

A defining characteristic of *buen vivir* is harmony, he says, harmony between human beings, and also between human beings and nature. A related theme is a sense of the collective. Capitalism is a great promoter of individual rights: the right to own, to sell, to keep, to have. But this alternative paradigm from South America subjugates the rights of the individual to those of peoples, communities and nature.

How does this play out in practice? Take property, for example. According to *buen vivir*, humans are never owners of the Earth and its resources, only stewards. This plays against the idea of natural capital, now used widely in business circles. Ecosystem services, for example, where a monetary value is given to environmental goods such as the water provision of rivers or carbon sequestration of forests, is anathema. ...

Buen vivir is an unfolding philosophy. ... It describes a way of life and a form of development that sees social, cultural, environmental and economic issues working together and in balance, not separately and hierarchically as at present. Rather than see *buen vivir* as a strict blueprint for change, Gudynas suggests that it is better to view it as a launch pad for fresh thinking and new perspectives: “It helps us see the limits of current development models and it allows us to dream of alternatives that until now have been difficult to fulfil.”

Excerpted from *The Guardian*, February 2013.

Share your insights

1. Do you agree with Jeff Rubin’s claim that “making do with less is better than always wanting more”?
2. How might your life (or your family’s life) change if you embraced the values and principles of *buen vivir*?
3. How do you experience the reality of living in a ‘global village’? Where do you see signs of Pope Benedict’s call to create “networks of love” in this global village?
4. If you wanted to convince a friend to use this resource, what would be your most persuasive selling point? What was its most helpful feature for you?

Additional Resources

For the most part, the resources listed below are written material. We also suggest a seven-minute video by Tim Jackson, British ecological economist and author (see also entry below), *Reimagining investment for the whole human*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVfIRnqDQ-w>

Gar Alperovitz. *What Then Must We Do – Democratizing wealth and building a community-sustaining economy from the ground up*. Chelsea Green Publishing. 2013.

Citizens for Public Justice. *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis*. 2013. www.cpj.ca

Tony Clarke, Jim Stanford, Diana Gibson and Brendan Haley. *The Bitumen Cliff: Lessons and Challenges of Bitumen Mega-Developments for Canada's Economy in an Age of Climate Change*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. 2013. See www.policyalternatives.ca or the Polaris Institute www.polarisinstitute.org.

Robert Costanza, Maureen Hart, Stephen Posner and John Talberth. *Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress*. Boston, MA: The Frederick S. Pardee Centre for the Study of the Longer-Range Future, Boston University. The Pardee Papers. No. 4. January 2009. www.bu.edu/pardee

John Dillon. *Pricing Carbon: A Primer*. Policy Briefing Paper No. 20. Toronto, ON: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. November 2009. www.kairoscanada.org.

John Dillon. *An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Adopt a Financial Transactions Tax*. Policy Briefing Paper No. 24. Toronto, ON: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. May 2010.

John Dillon. *A Sustainable Energy Economy is Possible*. KAIROS Research Paper. Toronto, ON: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. May 2012.

Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Building a New Culture: Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment*. Ottawa: CCCB. 2013.

Albert J. Fritsch, SJ. *Reclaiming the Commons: Challenging an Enlightened Church to Act*. Ravenna, KY: Earth Healing Inc. 2013.

Tim Jackson. *Prosperity without growth? The transition to a sustainable economy*. Sustainable Development Commission. March 2009.

Marc Lee. *Carbon bubbles and fossil fuel divestment*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. March 2013. <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2013/03/26/carbon-bubbles-and-fossil-fuel-divestment/>

Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. New World Library. 2012.

Additional Resources

National Farmers Union. *Omnibus bills, Idle No More and the NFU: Our common land, our common ground*. The Union Farmer Quarterly. Spring 2013. www.nfu.ca.

Andrew Nikiforuk. *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude*. Greystone Books and David Suzuki Foundation. 2012.

Max Paris. *Environmental watchdog worried about the rise of fracking*. CBC News, Environment unit. February 5, 2013.

Pontifical Academy of Sciences. *Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene*. A report by the Working Group commissioned by the Academy. April 2011.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness. *A Zero Growth Economy - The Dilemma of Growth*. Briefing paper produced for a joint program with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Brimingham, UK. 2009.

Jeffrey Sachs. *Transgressing Planetary Boundaries*. Scientific American Magazine. December 2009.

James G. Speth. *America the Possible: Manifesto for a New Economy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2012.

Peter Victor. *Managing Without Growth: Slower by Design, Not Disaster*. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd. 2008.

Peter Victor and Tim Jackson. *Doing the maths on the green economy*. Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science, Vol. 472. April 2011.

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press. Reprint edition, 2011.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its *Fifth Assessment Report* in Berlin in April 2014. IPCC assessments provide a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate-related policies. The report is available at the IPCC website at www.ipcc.ch.

An excellent article on the Report, *IPCC climate change report: averting catastrophe is eminently affordable*, by Damian Carrington, appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper, April 13, 2014 (www.theguardian.com/uk).

Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

Pope Francis



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Canadian Conference of the Catholic Bishops
2500 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1H 2J2

