



Faith, Ecology and Economy

For specific policy proposals see

<http://www.steadystate.org/CASSEPolicies.html>

The Faith, Economic, Ecology Working Group has requested a meeting with the Obama Transition Team. Our perspective on issues relates simultaneously to the global economy and to ecological issues, including climate change. The following brief statement by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns describes the basis of our concerns as people of faith engaging in the process of shaping U.S. foreign policy toward a better world.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns statement:

The present era is marked by a worldview that perpetuates an unsustainable economic model which is denigrating Earth's life-support systems, placing human and non-human communities of life in grave danger.

Although Indigenous Peoples have always understood the principle of sufficiency, the dominant worldview is generally unaware of resource limits or of natural processes for the regeneration of life. The principal agents driving the global economy are blind to the grave physical and moral consequences of ignoring these resource limits and natural processes. Evidence of this reality is attested to by Maryknoll Missioners from points near and far around the world, where life's most basic resources are every day rendered more scarce.

Slowly, however, humanity is recognizing the need to reorganize its economic and sociopolitical endeavors within the framework of a new cosmology based in contemporary scientific exploration and study of the earth and, indeed, the universe. Such a reframing, interpreted and given meaning through faith, would provide the context for a value system and worldview capable of inspiring human communities that are consciously rooted in right relationships with each other and within the larger community of life.

High food prices, rising sea levels, warming temperatures, volatile oil prices, frequent floods and terrifying storms are harbingers of a global reality spun out of control and threatening the world's most vulnerable people and species with starvation, poverty and extinction. Yet, the outcome is not written in stone. Some important structural shifts in the global economy and "business as usual" could radically improve the future for the entire planet.

The urgent need to transform our fossil-fuel-based economy and way of life must fully engage every U.S. American in the coming years. Ongoing food and water crises, the human and environmental impact of extractive industries, climate change and the end of cheap oil demand a deep transformation of existing systems and patterns of life related to transportation, food production and marketing, water use, manufacturing, consumption and energy use. The impact of volatile oil prices has already been felt in the U.S. and around the world, most painfully by poor people and low income communities. In many cases, food and water crises threaten their very future. Yet, many of the solutions thus far being proposed, including nuclear energy and agrefuels made from food plants, are themselves problematic and would perpetuate an environmentally unsustainable economic model.

For any transformation to become possible, the excessive influence of wealth and concentrated power in major political arenas must be brought to account. Wherever political and economic decisions ignore community rights to food, water, a clean and healthy environment, and a dignified life, change is necessary. The excessive focus on "economic growth" as a measure of



development put forward by major financial institutions and supported by U.S. policy is impossible to sustain indefinitely. Quality of life assessments and documented development success stories in places where the majority of people still live on less than \$2.00 a day point to the need for other proven tools to measure well being.

Renewed, more just relationships between human beings and the rest of creation are essential, as are new personal, family and community lifestyles encouraged and supported by state, national and global policies, structures and systems. Our moral obligation to the near and the distant future is clear. Neither the U.S. economy nor the global economy can be based on the unsustainable use of resources or the assumption that constant growth is an ultimate good. We must move toward a steady-state economy that limits the use of all natural resources to the planet's capacity to regenerate. Local and regional economies based on sustainable energy and equity for all must be encouraged.

Many faith communities are actively helping their members learn to live more simply, share their abundance and develop a sense of respect for the earth and responsibility for the use of natural resources. Some religious communities, as well as traditional societies have a long history of sharing property and wealth and of mutual accountability. At the same time, many contemporary secular communities have worked to build examples of more just, sustainable and viable models of business and community organization, including producer and worker cooperatives, land trusts, community-owned utilities, worker owned firms, community development financial institutions, community supported agriculture, local currency and barter systems. Some of these are beginning to assume a scale that could have a major positive impact on our common future.

These and other yet-to-be-discovered forms of sustainable economic organization can make an important contribution to a future that is freed from dependence on fossil fuels, that encourages socially and environmentally responsible lifestyles and that nurtures human security for all. Concrete examples like these can provide a solid base of experience from which to develop effective national and international policies.