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"The phenomenon of consumerism maintains an orientation towards 'possessing things' rather than towards 'the person.'"

Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church



Image courtesy of ebay

Millennium Consumption Goals Set The Cost of Consumerism

The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment, the position of the Carmelite NGO on climate change, addresses the issue of consumerism. The document lays out eight principles that are foundational to a sustainable environment. Perhaps the most telling regarding consumerism is principle number five – *Societies with no understanding will seek to deal with unlimited human desires by fostering consumerism by every means possible*. The document continues, “Our secular societies have no other ways to treat unlimited human desire than to feed them with consumerism.”

Most economies are built on the belief that consumption drives modern economies; for example, more is better or you cannot be happy if you do not own a certain brand of clothing, shoes, automobile, etc. However, consuming less creates its own problems. A growing body of research shows that shifts in consumer behavior could lead to reductions in greenhouse gases (GHG). Consuming less and fewer high-GHG items, and redirecting spending to low-GHG alternatives, could help reduce GHGs thus helping reduce global warming. According to a report by the Stockholm Environment Institute, Working Paper 2012-01, “purchase of low-GHG goods and services could reduce emissions associated with consumption in high-income countries by at least 10%.” However, the economic impact of low-GHG consumption could disproportionately affect poorer countries that depend on that income.

To address the issue of consumption the Millennium Consumption Goals (MCGs) were introduced. What are the MCGs? The MCG idea was proposed at the January 2011 UN sessions in New York, during preparations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Develop-



A report from the United Nations Environment Program states that the world is set to triple its consumption of natural resources by the middle of this century, unless countries are able to de-couple resource extraction from economic growth. If the world continues using its resources at current rates, humanity will be getting through some 140 billion tons of minerals, ores, fossil fuels and biomass annually by the year 2050. The report described this as "three times its current appetite," and an "unsustainable" rate of extraction. (Image from José Cabezas AFP/Getty Images)

ment, Rio + 20 in Brazil in June 2012. The MCGs are an outcome of the original focus on "sustainable consumption and production" in *Agenda 21* (Rio Earth Summit 1992, Chapter 4.3), and more recent initiatives like the Marrakesh Process (2003) that highlighted sustainable consumption and production (SCP). The MCGs seek to provide consumption targets designed to motivate the world's rich to consume more sustainably. They attempt to make human consumption and production more sustainable in economic, environment and social terms, thereby improving overall well being, reduce the stress on natural resources, free up resources to alleviate poverty, and ensure intra- and inter-generational equity.

Unsustainable patterns of consumption, production and resource exploitation have led to

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multiple problems that threaten our future, for example, the richest 20% of the world's population consumes over 80% of the world's output – 60 times more than the poorest 20%. To

offset this imbalance, proponents of the MCGs encourage advertisers that now promote over-consumption and waste to use the same advertising to encourage more sustainable consumption. They believe that over a period of time, social values and habits could be changed to favor more sustainable behavior.

They suggest the MCGs would target GHG emission reduction through: **energy use** – conservation, renewable energy, **water use** – conservation, quality, **land use** – biodiversity, and **pollution and waste** – toxic waste. Future areas the MCGs are considering could include: food security and agriculture, health, diet and obesity, livelihoods and lifestyles, economic-financial systems, and military expenditures.

The MCGs seek to provide a complementary path to global sustainability, for example, twinning the MCGs and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by directly linking a MCG in a rich country with a MDG in a poor country. MDG number eight is to *develop a*

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Useful Web Links Related to the Millennium Consumption Goals:

Website for the Millennium Consumption Goals
www.millenniumconsumptiongoals.org/

Summary of Millennium Consumption Goals as of Sept 2011
www.mcgforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Table-MCG-Summary-v2.pdf

Rio+20: UN Conference on Sustainable Development and Millennium Consumption Goals
www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=510&nr=312&menu=20

Sisters of Charity-Halifax: The Millennium Consumption Goals and Rio+20
www.schalifax.ca/?p=994

Indian Catholic Church Response to Millennium Consumption Goals
www.endpoverty2015.org/en/node/1087

For your convenience, these and other resources are linked on our website: carmelitengo.org



The National Science Foundation

Carmelite NGO Issues Its Position on Climate Change

The Carmelite NGO has published its first position paper, this one focused on Climate Change. Entitled *The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment*, the document was authored by Carmelite priest Eduardo Agosta Scarel, Ph.D. Fr. Eduardo holds a MSc in Atmospheric Sciences and a PhD in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the National University of Buenos Aires. He did post doctorate studies in the Interdisciplinary Team for Studies on Atmospheric Processes in the Global Change at the Pontifical Argentinian Catholic University where he currently works.



The *Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment* is available online and through the mail in English, Spanish, and Indonesian.

The document begins with a set of principles. It then explores the relationship between the Carmelite charism and transformation in particular. Such transformation is necessary for understanding the call to discover or be aware of the empowering love of God within human beings and other created things.

Ecology, the human activity concerned with regulating the relationship within and between all created things on the earth, must recall the divine dimension. Scarel writes, "The roots of the ecological crisis can be linked to the human relationship with the Divine and with nature." He sees the Carmelite value of contemplation as a way to rediscover the Divine dimension and healing nature.

The document then goes on to further explore the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis and a path for healing. The Carmelite tradition, especially as lived by John of the Cross is highlighted.

The position paper of the Carmelite NGO has been endorsed by many individuals and organizations from the faith community. Many of those endorsing the document are listed on the final page.

The document is available in three languages (English, Spanish, and Indonesian) to interested parties from the Carmelite NGO website (carmelitengo.org). Copies are also available from the Carmelite NGO offices in both New Orleans and New York.



Challenges to be Addressed in Rio+20 according to Ban Ki-moon

According to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon these "challenges can and must be addressed" during Rio+20 Conference:

- + More than \$2.1 trillion a year in wealth transfers from rich countries to poorer ones, in the name of fostering "green infrastructure," "climate adaptation" and other "green economy" measures.
- + New carbon taxes for industrialized countries that could cost about \$250 billion a year, or 0.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product, by 2020. Other environmental taxes are mentioned, but not specified.
- + Further unspecified price hikes that extend beyond fossil fuels to anything derived from agriculture, fisheries, forestry, or other kinds of land and water use, all of which would be radically re-organized. These cost changes would "contribute to a more level playing field between established, 'brown' technologies and newer, greener ones."
- + Major global social spending programs, including a "social protection floor" and "social safety nets" for the world's most vulnerable social groups for reasons of "equity."
- + Even more social benefits for those displaced by the green economy revolution—including those put out of work in undesirable fossil fuel industries. The benefits, called "investments," would include "access to nutritious food, health services, education, training and retraining, and unemployment benefits."



Suggested Millennium Consumption Goals

The MCGs are still a work in progress. Suggested MCGs include the following:

1. Greenhouse gas emissions reduction
2. Energy use (conservation, fossil fuels, renewable energy, transport, buildings, etc.)
3. Water use (conservation, quality, re-use, etc.)
4. Land and biomass use
5. Ores and industrial minerals
6. Construction materials and minerals
7. Pollution and waste (air and water effluents, solid waste, toxic waste and chemicals, etc.)
8. Food and agriculture
9. Health and obesity (Diet, smoking, exercise, etc.)
10. Livelihoods and lifestyles (working hours, work conditions, etc.)
11. Economic-financial systems (progressive taxation, banking reform, measures of well-being, etc.)
12. Military expenditures

CONSUMERISM

Business ethics and corporate social responsibility have gained more attention from researchers in recent years. One study in Finland indicates that while the majority of the respondents regard business ethics as important, this attitude does not translate into their product choices. Consumers are uncertain about which products and firms follow ethical rules and which do not. The most important obstacles to ethical consumption were difficulties in obtaining information, problems in product availability and high prices of ethical products. (Image from Concordia University-Wisconsin Department of History)

global partnership for development. This MDG addresses the least developed countries' special needs. It includes tariff and quota free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction.

Consumerism is a complex issue – one that requires prayer and study. Global economies are interconnected and depend heavily upon consumption. The fewer products rich countries consume, the more the lives of people in developing countries that depend upon the consumption patterns of rich countries are affected. A case in point is corn. The search for reducing GHGs led to the use of bio-fuels for transportation. Corn production for bio-fuel increased worldwide, but at the

“**The ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone ... the ecological crisis is a moral issue.**”

expense of corn production for food for human consumption in many developing countries. On the global market the price of corn increased by 9% becoming too expensive for many of the world's poorest countries to purchase. The price of corn was partly to blame for the world food crisis of 2009.

“At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment.” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Global Climate Change, 2001)

Where can we find God in the milieu of consumerism? In the Book of Genesis, where we find God's first self-revelation to humanity, there is a recurring refrain: “And God saw that it was good.” All that God created was good, not just some things, but all of creation. We can find God by recognizing the gift of creation and appreciating its goodness; so we can liberate ourselves from an inordinate appetite for more before this appetite destroys us and the earth, as we know it. Pope John Paul II stated, “...the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone...I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue.” Caring for creation can lead to developing a new global economy, one based on respect for creation and human needs, and not one based on satisfying a never-ending desire for more that eventually can lead to the destruction of the earth. A new global economy requires an awareness of our responsibilities in a global economy, an economy that respects the dignity and rights of all of creation. It's possible that in such an economy we will recognize that – “God has created us to live in harmony with all created things and with God the Creator.” (*The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment*, Principle #4).

by Jane Remson, O. Carm. - Main Representative



Join with others around the world in prayer and reflection

**World Environment Day
JUNE 5, 2012**

materials available at
carmelitengo.org

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