Introduction

If you really listen now, [people in the local parish] even talk about the times getting harder and that things have to change. But I find that the church itself hasn’t changed and the church is not very helpful in the community. They give food and furniture if needed, but only to people who belong to the parish – not just a person who has needs. I still look up to my priest and if I needed something, he would be there to help me. But I don’t find that the church is there for us in our struggles. (Chamberlain, 1996, p. 20)

What religion prevails? What is the religion that “reconnects” our world and our relationships?... Are we not dealing with a kind of metareligion, a religion handed down and institutionalized by the international economic market? How can we build community in the midst of the anonymity of life in big cities? How can we live in community when the TV beckons us to shut ourselves inside with our favourite program? How can we live in community when suspicion and fear begin to threaten our relationships in the neighbourhood and on the block? (Gebara, 1999, pp. 198-199)

To be authentically human is to centre one’s life on the world God so loves. It has always meant that, but today it is critical to do so. The creation God loves is sick unto death, and needs caretakers, lovers, gardeners, companions and partners who will work to preserve life rather than death, collective security rather than national security, rice in the mouth and a roof over the head rather than military and nuclear hardware. The kind of love that is needed to make the vision a reality has tough sinews. It roots up and pulls down, builds and plants. It is full of tenderness. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. It wipes away tears from all eyes. (Wilson, 1989, p. 252)
The world is in deep trouble even as it is filled with courage, joy, and beauty. The ecological destruction and rampant impoverishment of so many are primarily the consequences of political economic forces that have a singular aim: an increase of the wealth of the privileged by the unfettered growth of production and consumption. The profound crisis of the contemporary society in which we live is being felt in very diverse groups and raises acutely the desire for community. “The moral issue of our day – and the vocation to which we are called – is whether we and other species will live and how well we will live” (McFague, 1993, p. 9). Many agree that globalization lies at the heart of the current crisis and that the economic crisis is actually an ethical crisis. The ethical crisis is not the only problem, but it is the single most important factor. A liberative religious ethic offers descriptions, guides for action, and ways to assess community.

I work as a Christian social ethicist whose life is shaped by various local, national, and global communities and by commitments to justice and love, peace, and the integrity of creation. In this chapter, I am interested in three critical questions and their related questions. First, what is community? How is community critical? What is the role for religious communities? Second, what is globalization? How does globalization affect Canada? Why does it matter to religious communities such as churches and congregations? Third, how is community fostered? What are some Canadian examples of response to the global order of things? If our world is to be a habitable and cultured home in which hopeful diversity and respect for difference replaces violence and hopeless divisions, the goal of such an ethic will be to forge new and embodied bonds of community.

What Is “Community”?

Community is an ambiguous term. It refers to “any social grouping, any collection of people sharing something important.... Communities are the forms of our social relatedness and the material reality of the moral life” (Birch & Rasmussen, 1989, pp. 18-19). Where do we experience community? In any day we may participate in several communities – at home, at work, in the neighbourhood, as part of a religious organization, and in wider circles of concern. We also claim community as members of, for example, groups as diverse as racial or ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, socio-economic class, religious, national, and geographical. Where do we find ourselves affirmed, sharing stories, being held accountable, having values and convictions confirmed, accepting sustenance in times of doubt, and reconnecting with energy to persevere and embrace life? These are marks of creative communities, communities of life that encounter diversity and complexity. We may have fostered community, or been surprised to experience it, through volunteer tutoring, a 12-step program, or a group related to one’s Caribbean or Celtic culture. Other experiences of community may have come from a Wednesday-night Bible study, a Mexico rural educational exchange, an AIDS support network, or an Out of the Cold program offering food and shelter to homeless guests.
We inhabit various communities where meanings and identities are created in personal relationship with others who share some history, narratives, and activities. Community is also found in friendships (Lind, 1995, pp. 89ff). Friendship means being in a respectful, mutual relationship as persons who are centred and respectfully concerned for other persons. Community relates to the quality of relationship built on face-to-face, personal connections. Community is also shaped in distinct social contexts with intricate infrastructures, such as religious institutions, schools, hospitals, political parties, government and non-governmental agencies, professional and neighbourhood associations, and advocacy groups. Communities are strongest when connected to organizations and institutions that develop shared values (for example, dignity, respect, care, mutuality, reciprocity, and compassion) out of shared goals (for example, justice, peace, integrity of creation, co-operation, and solidarity). Communities, like friendships, flourish when people come together as persons who freely join and are there not only for a pragmatic purpose. In short, it is a moral act to forge bonds of mutual relationship across differences in a world hostile to ventures of community. Religious traditions are primary harbingers and carriers of values and, as moral communities, form character and agency. The search for structures or shapes of human life in community will aim to name what is wrong, to imagine alternatives, and to strategize ways to change things so no one will be excluded.

We live in a world of violence and suffering structured by competition and domination of the almighty dollar that commodifies everything – water, children, and the time of our lives. We recognize that we live in the midst of a global war economy where vast resources of capital and technology are being directed by the powerful at the expense of the majority, including this fragile earth home. Canada plays an important role in this scenario and Canadians need to clarify the extent to which this globalized war economy and Canada’s role in it constitute a moral disorder. This economy poses real threats to the future of both humanity and wider creation, which, in turn, presents a fundamental challenge to all our religious traditions and categories of moral judgment.

Caution must be raised at the outset, therefore, about the ambiguous theological heritage regarding community. Churches have participated in, benefited from, and maintained the status quo of social, political, and economic relations based on an us-them designation. For example, those who are generous to strangers may, however, extend this generosity only to those who are like themselves. The reluctance to challenge dynamics of community that exclude individuals – for example, those who are made other because of white racism or class elitism – is an urgent concern of a critical and transformative notion of community.

The key questions about habits or skills that build community and its religious role include the following. Is dialogue, where meaning is constructed through an ongoing interaction between oneself and others, a developed habit? Is interpersonal perspective-taking, or the ability to see through the eyes and respond to the feelings and concerns of the other, a habit or skill that is practised? To what extent is solidarity extended beyond the believing community? Does this community
reflect on the influence of, and resist intentionally, the dynamics of their specific context by exercising the habit of critical, systemic thought, developing the capacity to identify parts and the connections among them as coherent patterns, and reflecting evaluatively on them? Does it seek to live out the values professed in ways that encourage a way of life where holistic thought – the ability to intuit life as an interconnected whole – leads to practical action and wisdom? (Daloz Parks et al. 1996, p. 108) These habits and skills are important in the way that communities respond to their environments of particular power relations and integrate a critique of personal and global dimensions for the sake of social and ecological reconciliation.

What About Christian Community?

Community, whether strong or weak, is the matrix of the ethical life (Rasmussen, 1993, pp. 12-14). In postmodern societies, where we are able to live with millions of total strangers, how do we learn to be community? Theologically, we exist within the interdependence of the web of life that arises from and returns to God. The church is one community of ethical formation whose convictions are shaped by the impact of Jesus of Nazareth who embodied and preached right relation in community as the reign of God (basileia tou theou in Greek). The Christian church claims a collection of wildly diverse Hebrew and Greek writings as its normative scriptures. These texts animate ministries of word, sacrament, and witness around the world in an astonishing array of forms. Christian tradition can be interpreted in many ways. For example, the good news of the gospel is that God reconciles us and accompanies us as the divine community of Love, Christ, and Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:13). God continues to create, redeem, and renew the groaning cosmos and people join in this process. In this sense, God is the power of mutual relation and the passion for justice and love. Justice is our co-capacity for relationships of radical reciprocity such as “sharing all things in common,” as did the early Christians (Acts 2:44-45). Justice means having sufficient resources and power to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged persons in support of social and cosmic well-being. The question of empowerment in community requires further scrutiny. These questions must be answered: which convictions count; by which community are they formed; and in what way, with whom, where, and to what end?

The broad concern in this chapter arises from the struggle to refashion sustainable earth communities that enable the kind of sharing that can ensure, against great odds, that none among us are oppressed, marginalized, homeless, hungry, lonely, or alienated. Religious responses to the uneven and disruptive impacts of corporate economic globalization, however, remain quite divergent and incompatible. Religion, like community, is ambiguous and can be a force for either maintenance or disruption of the status quo. Scriptures and church traditions contain enormous ambiguity about how God’s people are to deal with outsiders and the causes, for example, of injustice and poverty. Various elements of conservative religion and right-wing Christianity bless the neo-liberal promise of success and wealth, in an attempt to entrenched the elite niche of privilege and benefit from which its members
either gain directly or feel enmeshed or comfortable with this niche. The primary and often exclusive goal of many such religious communities is an escape from the threat and insecurity of increased pluralism, diversity, and transition. This type of religion offers refuge in an intimate group of fellow believers and ideal family life, abstracted from the public life; at the same time its established elites build converging alliances aimed at political economic dominance. The goal is a return to supposedly stable religious foundations and traditional, often patriarchal, sets of values.

Christian liberation-oriented traditions standing in the history of radical social gospel movements, however, hold that, for the privileged, community is connected to power as dominance and that unshakeable belief is not the same as truth, not even if it is claimed as a church community’s truth. That is to say, there is no escape from self-critical ethical discernment, responsibility, and accountability whether these are avoided by good intentions, ignorance, belonging to the right community, or superior social standing. Neither is any community guaranteed immunity from change or abdication from the politics of everyday life and its intrinsic issues of power relations. The real issue at hand for the survival of creative communities in this interdependent world will be whether they exclude or connect with others (Bounds, 1997, p. 112).

On the one hand, Christian tradition has strongly affirmed community. For example, values and teachings of radical inclusion are found in early Christian ideas of egalitarian discipleship in which women and men, slaves and free, Jew and Greek are to be included; violence is eschewed; and forgiveness is to be the ethic of community. Yet, on the other hand, this language – which functions today in many mainstream, especially liberal Protestant congregations – is often taken to mean privatized, that is, just for those who believe and act as we do.

Elizabeth Bounds points out that transformative possibilities are lost when the language of inclusion is applicable only to the life of the internal community and to the life of individuals within it: “As people become weary of the instability and confusion of their lives, they become eager for the certain answer, the solid tie, the reassurance of security ...the question is whether our stability is bought at the price of someone else’s instability and suffering” (1997, p. 112). Ironically, when Christians withdraw in search of refuge from postmodern fragmentation into familiar enclaves – for example, white people who have lost their moorings in particular cultures and histories in the face of diversity – the possibilities of connection with a wider world vanish. So do the stories and struggles that illuminate the nature and causes of so much suffering as well as ways of courage and invitations to resist. Therefore, many Christian communities are very limited in the skills and attitudes necessary for advocating global justice and reconciliation. They appear mainly interested in maintaining secure spaces that can include and sustain them in their attempts to cope with the problems of daily living, not in connecting with grassroots and structural efforts, both local and global, for survival and to nurture hope and sustain life.
Pamela Brubaker poignantly asks why most churches in North America are silent on issues of justice and the common good, especially on matters of economics and politics. Consumptive, competitive cultures diminish everyone’s ethical capacity to deal critically with such huge issues, and we become numb to them. In the void left by lack of community, some people derive their sense of personal significance from their duty to work and professionalism. Denial and minimization are also coping strategies used effectively to avoid facing injustice and evil in a world shaped by globalization (2001, p. 63). Globalization symbolizes a form of human power that erodes national, human, and ecological boundaries; this out-of-control economic and financial system has placed no limits on the engine fuels of profit and growth.

The term “community”, as used today, has many different meanings that indicate reaction to the disruptive features of this postmodern age and its globalized world order. We hear daily of the steady advance of a debilitating and unprecedented scale of economic anxiety, poverty, violence, refugee-migratory labour, and environmental degradation. In the history of theology and ethics, community has often been a rallying cry, rather than a critical concept, since it invokes connection, safety, familiarity, belonging – all experiences people crave in an often bewildering, fragmented, and exploitative society. In short, community is a desired, yet problematic, category (Bounds, 1997, p. 27). Developing sustainable community amid corporate economic globalization entails many choices that demand discernment, negotiation, communication, and practice. Community can decline into a parasitic enclave of comfort and security for a few amid growing disorder and imbalance. Or it can emerge as a prophetic coalition of movements and persons – a web of intricate, interdependent relations – committed locally and globally towards reconstructing a just social order built on living with respect in creation. In the long run, secluded and exclusive enclaves are terribly insecure and increasingly at risk. Genuine security and personal well-being can only emerge from participating with others to build shared and purposeful lives that encourage care and responsibility across difference.

**How Is Community “Critical”?**

Canadians live in a crisis of economics, ethical integrity, and fairness at a time when political, social, and economic forces could, instead, be organized toward the common good. Critical thinking involves calling into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual patterns of acting, feeling, and thinking, and being prepared to act, feel, and think differently on the basis of this critical exposure (Brookfield, 1991, p. 1). For example, what is and what isn’t a community? Who belongs, is welcomed, or excluded, and why? Who is talking about the crisis and need for community, and why? Where is the economy addressed, or is it kept invisible? Are religious communities providing alternative community spaces with room to learn about different needs and abilities to meet them and to participate in the conflicts and negotiations required to meet different groups and
needs? Ethical critique requires discerning, listening ears and discerning, perceptive eyes — sound criticism is learned by noticing dissonance and muffled voices and by entertaining questions that unveil incomplete and controversial perceptions. Ethical critique also requires decolonized spaces where acting, feeling, and thinking can be exposed and reoriented. Significant to such critique are learned habits of openness to difference, revelation, and personal reorientation. Perspectives and stories other than the most familiar or comforting ones are the basis for learning such habits.

Critical accountability also happens when we engage with the experiences and ideas of those who dwell beyond church borders (Rasmussen, 1993, p. 17). For example, a placard at a rally protesting the lack of affordable housing reads “Do you know? The so-called housing shortage is just a rumour being put about by people with nowhere to live!” This is an example of social protest. Beyond protest, and on the way towards healing and justice, social analysis provides ways of understanding the effects of how we are socially located. Social analysis also helps understand how social institutions work and how social forces, as well as personal narratives, shape human experience on a fragile earth (for example, Albrecht, 1995; Bounds, 1997; Brubaker, 2001; Czerny & Swift, 1984; Harrison, 1985; Holland & Henriott, 1983; Rumscheidt, 1998). Questioning how our communities are shaped by the struggles, hunger, desires, tears, and joys of the most dispossessed is a helpful starting place to begin articulating critical questions.

Without self-critique and willingness to change, religion actually malforms ethical identity, conviction, and community. Self-criticism, taking responsibility for oneself, and openness to the critiques of the marginalized are ways Christians and churches can be held and can hold themselves accountable. While its ethical performance as community and in wider civil society is crucial, the religious ethical life does not come without risk or cost. Neither is it the only ethical community in town; many emergent ethical communities of resistance and reconstruction are doing social analysis and examining alternative practices. A critical gauge of religiously sustained praxis (critical action done reflectively) can be identified within this framework of being held accountable. Amid the imbalance of the current phase of economic globalization, does the religiously oriented community contribute to a critical analysis of power and its responsible rehabilitation, both internally and in its extended web of relations?

The particular concern of this chapter is the role each of us and our religious communities can play in mending this world that is in the grips of corporate economic globalization.

What Is Neo-liberal Globalization and What Does It Look Like in Canada?

The extent of globalization today is unparalleled. As Christopher Lind explains, “globalization is that process which has led to the creation of a single, international (global) financial or capital market. It happened in stages and its effects are nothing short of revolutionary” (1995, p. 31). Globalization is a system
of rapidly expanding political and economic interdependence. The current phase of corporate economic globalization has been developed on the basis of what is known in Canada as the neo-conservative or neo-liberal agenda. Its primary belief is the rule of unrestricted markets and the unfettered movement of capital, goods, and services. It holds that competing forces of economic self-interest are guided by an invisible hand that will ensure the optimum good as each individual pursues his or her own financial gain and security. Neo-liberalism is a set of economic goals that is promoted by conservative politicians and transnational corporations in opposition to political, social, and religious progressives. These goals have become widespread in the last 25 or so years through powerful financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and Wall Street credit agencies.

Neo-liberalism is made operational by deregulation, privatization, and liberalization. Deregulation refers to the withdrawal of the state from managing public services or regulating economic and financial transactions. It requires the elimination of government intervention that could affect the unrestricted and accountable functioning of the market – such as price controls, public subsidies, and incentives or disincentives of various kinds. Under neo-liberal direction, this logic does not apply to government subsidies of private corporations, which takes place, for example, by reducing or not enforcing the collection of corporate taxes and protecting their markets.

Privatization involves transferring the ownership and management of government-held enterprises to privately owned, for-profit companies that are often related to essential public goods and services such as electricity, water, railroads, hospitals, and education. The economics of market liberalization agreements – such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), or the most recent Plan Pueblo Panama (PPP) – entails lowering or removing tariffs or duties, giving up any domestic control over essential sectors such as trade and finance, allowing foreign companies to own key enterprises (such as banks), and reducing controls on foreign investment and capital (Martinez & Garcia, 2000; Brubaker, 2001, pp. 28-29; Wellman, 2001). The contradictions of neo-liberal economics spawn contrasting moral visions at the core of debates over globalization. Increasing inequalities and conflicts between and among nations and the escalating dangers for ecological and economic sustainability provoke pivotal ethical questions.

Who gains and who loses in Canada under economic globalization? Canada has a long history of commitment to the welfare state as a social mandate to reduce economic insecurity resulting from child-bearing, employment transition, rural cycles of seasonal work, sickness, disability, unemployment, or old age. The welfare state provides a minimum guaranteed income and equal access to a whole range of social services for all members of society regardless of class or purchasing power (Carniol, 2000, p. 7). Yet Canada today faces major debt and structural adjustment programs; ongoing major federal and provincial cutbacks to health, education, and social safety-net programs; and the privatization of public utilities.
The concentration of power in the market is growing, and accompanying this is a redefinition of state political power to secure borders at the expense of attention to the needs of civil society, such as education and health care. Additionally, the gap between rich and poor is widening. Child poverty has increased since 1989, more and more people are homeless, and many more rely on food banks for daily sustenance on a regular basis. This gap is graphically portrayed by some telling data. For instance, in Canada in the late 1990s, each of the 10 richest chief executive officers was taking home more than $10 million annually, reflecting an average salary increase of 50 per cent. Meanwhile, average wages for the workforce as a whole increased in the period 1995-98 by only 2 per cent (Yalnizyan, 1998, pp. 13-14). The shift to wealth accumulation in service and computerized technologies means that many Canadians lack the requisite skills to compete in the marketplace. Discrimination based on gender, race, and class continues to block avenues for jobs or retooling to meet the demands of new industries. For example, when computers are not available to working class or underclass kids, they enter school with a new kind of disadvantage.

Globalization has meant downward pressure on wages and social standards, high unemployment, a crisis of the welfare state, and the erosion of national sovereignty.

**How Has Globalization Affected Community?**

The globalization of capital and its restructuring of economic relations have also meant the impoverishment of cultures through promoting a commercialized homogenization and the destruction of communities (Van Drimmelen, 1998, pp. 10, 24-28). Under globalization, all of us are construed as consumers and are bombarded with an endless assortment of tempting goods. Major sectors of wealth and decision-making have decided to value short-term accumulation of profit and capital at the expense of permanently writing off many economically depressed communities. Community has been further eroded when governments restructure by eliminating or downsizing the social agencies or programs in which communities used to find support for meeting basic needs (Carniol, 2000; Chamberlain, 1996).

Christopher Lind lucidly underscores how globalization has eroded community. He summarizes his analysis into a four-stage process and conclusion (1995, pp. 92-93, 96). First, there was a change in the material reality, that is, in the concrete conditions for integrating all national markets for financial capital into the formation of one global capital market. In turn, this produced, secondly, a power shift from nation to market. When the boundaries and power of the market became massively larger than the boundaries and power of the nation, the power shifted from the political voices and public institutions to economic voices and market institutions.

Third, this power shift weakened key institutions of the civil society. Civil society is that fuzzy non-market and non-government social space of communities
and associations. It includes communities of face-to-face intimacy, such as student unions, daycare centres, farmers’ groups, families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, voluntary societies, women’s groups, non-governmental organizations, and communications media (Swift, 1999). Here, in civil society, is where the power shift has resulted in a continuing battle of ideas. Some people are taking the material change of economic globalization as a positive occurrence and seek to make the values of efficiency and competitiveness the same criteria for social institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and social welfare agencies. Other voices in Canada are resisting globalization, seeing it as a development that results in loss of political and social control. These voices seek alternatives to the unregulated expansion of transnational capital because they see it eroding participation in democratic decision-making as power is increasingly lodged in boardrooms that are not accountable to public arenas or meeting needs not only for profit.

Finally, the corporate agenda of globalization was followed by government initiatives to restructure a wide range of institutions and endorse the short-term benefits of market-driven financial accumulation. In short, Lind concludes that globalization erodes community by altering the material reality – the social, economic, and political infrastructures – that are embedded in communities as the frameworks for their common action and identities. If evil is the active or passive effort to deny or undermine another’s mutual-relations-of-power through responsibility for justice and healing, then evil is structured and driven by corporate globalization. The capacity for mutual relations of co-responsibility is influenced by the social arrangements of a community. Globalization draws a vision of unlimited wealth and success for all but erases particular identities, cultures, and species. It rapidly advances the changes of the material reality on which communities rely as a framework for their common life. It undermines not only the sociocultural and political economic basis of sustainable living, but also the very ecological possibility of community itself. It seriously threatens, with irrevocable climate change and permanent reductions in bio-diversity, the very fragile and interdependent ecosystems that surround communities and upon which communities depend at the most basic biological and spiritual levels of life.

Thus social structures, such as economic globalization, shape human and ecological relations, for good and for ill. In theological terms, evil is the capacity and reality of destroying the very fabric of life; evil is the wrong that we do to each other and it plays itself out over time in the very way social systems develop. Social structures are the patterned ways communities and groups relate to one another that generate dynamics of power that shape our communal and personal identities, including our sense of self-worth and self-esteem. As Beverly Harrison explains (1985, pp. 154ff), where the great disparities of power exist, the predominant mode of social interaction is violence or control by coercion. The ethical problem of community in this reading is not the loss of traditional values. Rather, the issue is the social system that cannot accommodate the well-being of real, living people within creation because the system shunts people aside if they do not fit its needs, which are to produce and realize a high rate of return over costs. If people are
subordinate to profit-making and cannot survive tough economic competition, they are abandoned as economically unnecessary, frequently blamed as useless or a social liability, or morally disfigured in the drive to outperform their neighbour.

Therefore, human beings under corporate globalization are construed as isolated individuals rather than persons in community. Humans are viewed essentially as competitive rather than co-operative and are assumed, above all, to be consumers rather than interdependent creatures. As a consequence, is it any wonder there is a deep yearning for community? Pick up a newspaper, go to a café, or surf the web with this in mind. What form is this desire taking? An intelligible, embodied faith will encourage assessment of ways that our actions may improve a situation. For this to be the case, critical communities need to become economically literate.

A knowledge of economics is often mystified and relegated to experts. Instead, let us think of economics in terms of its origin in the Greek word *oikos*, which means a household and what it takes to arrange what is necessary for survival and well-being. Economics is something we are intimately concerned about and involved in – it is about what people do to live. Good economic practice will enhance ways of making food, shelter, and clothes; exchanging goods and services; performing meaningful work; and using capital, people’s labour, and other natural resources. Who is siding with an *oikumene*, a world household of elites committed to domination, to possessions, and to indifference amidst the erosion of the common good and sustainability? Who is opting for an *oikumene* of participation, sharing, co-operation, solidarity, and compassion? Why? What’s at stake and for whom?

**Empowerment for Building Communities in Which We Can Live**

Rebuilding human communities needs to start from the ground of daily living. An essential dimension of religious life today is “dwelling among” by getting rooted in specific communities and histories that are genuinely local. Repairing the basic fabric of ethical and social life includes taking seriously one’s own needs and capacities in conjunction with “people’s struggles and their hopes, their powerlessness, and their inherent energies for life in community. The prophetic voice of challenge to those in power has to be supplemented by the voice of encouragement and support for those who sustain the web of life” (Wellman, 2001, pp. 43-44). No one can make their way in the world without communities – of loyalty, accountability, and vision. Where do we find communities of life and work, faith, and hope that bear witness to the divine communal love expressed in daily bread and that exceed the usual convictions about justice and the good life?

While religious groups and institutions are often buffer zones of status quo against social transformation, there are cases throughout Canada where people join with others for religious reasons to resist economic injustice, racism, sexism, and other forms of violence. In theological terms these are called social sins. The hope of struggles to resist the damages of globalization and to shape civil society is to build a welcoming and peaceful world. Faithfulness will not be modelled, there-
fore, around a uniform, unchanging tradition but around discovering God in the
midst of those who struggle to reclaim and release their power despite the over-
whelming dynamics of corporate globalization. This vocation to mend the earth
will include those who have been excluded or disempowered from realizing those
right relations of justice and reconciliation demanded by the new global desire for
participation sustained by progressive religious movements.

Roger Gottlieb characterizes a spirituality of resistance as one that “marries
traditional religious ideas of ethical concern with social awareness. In an ecocidal
age, that awareness will see the suffering not just of my neighbour, but of the whole
human world, and will extend itself to the nonhuman as well as human” (Brubaker,
2001, p. 70). In the following examples of building communities of solidarity and
resistance, empowerment is the key. Empowerment is “the process and product of
bringing people together in such a way that they can critically analyze and
responsibly use power within particular contexts” (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p.
114). Wherever we experience ourselves as participants in building communities
and solidarities, authorizing self-respect as the bedrock of justice, and encountering
others on their own terms, we will meet the power and presence of God.

The following six snapshots of Canadian communities with Christian ties
express a quality of relationship that involves personal history, identity, mutuality,
and fellowship (Lind, 1995, p. 91). The photo album shows scenes from urban and
rural settings, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, food, housing, land, and celebration.
They are all rooted in local soil, grassroots activism, and ecological consciousness,
and often they have explicit global connections. While not exclusively cases of
community economic development, they indicate a commitment to decentralized
patterns of owning, producing, and sharing that value one another’s company and
lend hope for a sustainable future. Each community is a group of people who are
socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-mak-
ing, who develop alternative practices, and who tell a different history in the effort to
renew sustainable communities of right relation.

1. **Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op, Grand Pré, Nova Scotia.** In 1996, a group in
Kings County, Nova Scotia, came together to envision interesting and meaningful
work distributing good coffee for a good cause – fair trade. “Just Us!” – as its
playful name suggests – is a worker-owned co-operative that has grown into a
thriving establishment to further social and economic justice, both locally and
globally. It imports and sells fairly traded, organically grown coffees and teas.
Fairly traded products are grown with sustainability in mind. Important considera-
tions are a sustainable livelihood for farmers that guarantees them a fair price for
their produce and a sustainable environment so that soil, water, natural habitat, and
biodiversity are enhanced by farming methods. Also important is a sustainable
network of social supports for vibrant community; this occurs by allocating a
percentage of income to health, schools, clinics, renewable energy, and cultural
preservation. Based on good products, good prices, and good information, “Just
Us!” is helping to build constructive relationships through partnerships between
Third World producers such as the bean growers of the Mexican Union of Indig-
2. Lemon and All Spice Cookery is a small food-catering business in downtown Toronto that provides employment for people with intellectual disabilities. Begun in 1998 with government funds, it is thriving with regular and ongoing support from a local church congregation, a credit union, and a community living association. The Cookery is a partnership of participants whose goal is to define their world for themselves and to live with dignity and enthusiasm. The workers share a sense of enjoyment in whatever task they undertake, whether baking; making sandwiches; preparing fruit, vegetable, and cheese trays; or serving food. They sell wholesale to retail stores, cater meetings and events, provide cookies and lunches for the weekly Out of the Cold Program, and operate a coffee and snack service. Links with various agencies and groups are crucial to the Cookery’s survival. “This work allows me,” says Carolyn Lemon, the founding organizer, “to give form to my concern for justice by engaging in a practical way...[to contribute to] the economic and political struggle for employment creation” (Lemon, 1998). She reports that these young people gain confidence by getting to know one another; they do a lot of affirmative touch through back massages, laughing, and hugs. They also argue and complain but they know ways to resolve problems (Lemon, 1998). This community venture includes friendship building as well as developing communication, decision-making, and dispute-resolution skills. The Cookery is not self-sufficient but transparently interdependent and readily acknowledges that it is embedded in a larger web of community relations. It is a community that reaches out with good food and abundant spirit, inviting others to accompany its practices of economic development that bring one another into well-being.

3. Wabigoon Lake First Nation (Anishnaabe) runs a wild rice co-op called Kagjwosa Manomin near Dryden in northwestern Ontario. It is a non-profit and worker-owned co-operative that is not run by the band. “Their wild rice co-op is more than just a business venture aimed at creating income and employment in a region where both are scarce...it rests on a vision of respect for Creation and for traditional ways, even if that isn’t the most ‘efficient’ way of doing things” (Bird, 1998, pp. 74ff). The manomin, or wild rice – the meaning in the Anishnabek language is “Seed of the Great Spirit” – has been the shared ecological basis of the life of this community for generation upon generation. European colonization irrevocably changed social and economic relations for the community, both internally and with respect to the larger surrounding world.

Today, market liberalization compounds the struggles for this collective to be viable considering how resources are controlled from outside by large corporations and streamlined in favour of concentrating production in huge agribusiness ven-
tures. For example, their rice harvesting is certified organic. This allows the families to maintain part of their traditional wild-crafting lifestyle, which includes weedcutting, guiding, trapping, fishing, and berry-picking, as well as the care and harvesting of manomin. Yet in a competitive market that drives down prices due to large economies of scale maximized for short-term gain, this model makes it difficult to survive. Church-supported funding through the Canadian Alternative Investment Co-Operative and other organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, has been important to its survival. Spiritually, this collaboration is shaped with respect for indigenous beliefs and practices.

4. The Women-Land-Spirit Sacred Web is a project based in western Canada. Grounded in the interplay of connections between women, land, and spirit, it is committed to expression through art, story, justice-making, and ritual. It is a movement to respond to the deep and poignant call of the earth and of humanity living in sustainable relationships of mutuality. This community is formed around a vision to connect singing (inspired by the music of Carolyn McDade), reflection, and creative expression as part of the intentional work of creating right relationship and sustainable ways of living with each other and the land. While most participants do not make their living on the land, their living is of the land and this is what binds them together. At regional gatherings and gatherings of women, mostly from across the western provinces, participants have shared stories of pain, vision, and healing initiatives, including efforts at sustainable agriculture and economic development. The Sacred Web collective encourages other circles of connection and supports smaller groups by the conversations page of their web site: www.gis.net/~surtsey/womenlandspirit. The project has generated a CD and cassette, We Are the Land We Sing, recorded with Carolyn McDade, and an anthology of writings about women-land-spirit.

5. Genesis Land Conservancy/Earthcare Connections grew from the legacy of the prairie struggle for community survival. As Christopher Lind tells the story (1998), Rhonda Sterling sold her family farm near Kindersley, Saskatchewan, not on the open market but to a land trust that would ensure the land is farmed on a sustainable basis — sustainable for the land and sustainable for the community as well. “I want to see small farmers living independently, but cooperatively too,” she said. The land trust to which Rhoda sold her land is the Genesis Land Conservancy. Formed in 1996, the Conservancy is using holistic management methods to encourage young farmers to enter farming without incurring massive debts. The young farmers will have a lifetime lease, but not the burden of a mortgage. The Conservancy is supported by Earthcare Connections, an ecumenical, sustainable agriculture program. Earthcare is funded by the Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Anglican, United, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches. It promotes policies for economic production in balance with healthy ecosystems that contribute to the health and welfare of all, seeking to support a healthy rural network in partnership with urban people. Providing information, research, and hands-on experience so that people can make ethical choices is another goal of Earthcare (www.earthcare.ca).
The organization works with straw bale construction, herb farming, fruit shelter belts, organic practices, and alternative forms of energy.

6. Garneau United Place in Edmonton grew out of a United Church congregation’s crisis of survival in the mid-1990s. Active in community and social justice concerns since 1928, the congregation had shrunk, the church building had aged, and financial viability was a pressing concern. A process of dreaming and consultation was initiated and, after persevering in negotiations, a plan emerged in 1996 that had continuity with the history and priorities of the congregation. As Judith Moodie explained (1998), the congregation decided to construct a new building that would house the church, provide suites for people needing assistance with daily living, and rent out office as well as meeting space. Not surprisingly, the financial base proved to be the greatest hurdle. Garneau United Assisted Living Place, a not-for-profit company, was set up to develop a business plan; it formed an equity fund and the congregation contributed the land. The design took into consideration the existing architecture of neighbouring buildings, the local residents, and the preservation of trees on the site. On September 25, 1999, the old Garneau was demolished in four hours, making space for a viable future. About a year later, Garneau United Place had lived through its risk of renewal and entered into the hope of regeneration as a faith community by embarking on new relationships with the residents, the congregation, and community members. This is another model of a new space created by staying rooted in an urban place.

Staying Power: Communities with Spiritualities of Resistance and Connectedness

These practices of community assert commitment to a neighbourly and sustainable life. They attend to the norms Aruna Gnanadason cites: to build local and regional communities that are economically viable, socially equitable, and ecologically renewable (Wellman, 2001, p. v). Here we can begin to imagine that religious groups and institutions are connected communities, and are linked to larger organizational networks, farmers’ groups, women’s organizations, social service coalitions, and wider religious networks as well as non-local coalitions. For example, churches in a postmodern world are no longer monolingual enclaves but already connected, whether recognized or not, through many informal and formal networks. Religious communities are well positioned to hear diverse needs and yearnings. Gregory Baum, for example, urges us to tell our personal and communal stories in ways that bind persons together in the struggle for justice and reveal the nature of the liberated society — of sustainable community (1989, p. 223). Churches and other religious groups can better serve the public good, not as the sole institution but by being part of wider public conversations, disputes, and action.

Larry Rasmussen provides three images of community that will enable churches to become connective agents among various nodes of communities (1993, pp. 153ff). Following Jesus’ understanding of creative, transforming power, the task is to enable churches to become inclusive communities based on egalitar-
ian membership that serves as a radical critique and agent of transformation within the Church. Second, congregations can work to become communities of pioneering creativity to experiment with and promote forms of connection and agency that gather strangers together to forge a common space and purpose. Third, churches will aim to be communities that offer a haven or way station in the midst of shaky social structures, outbreaks of violence, and plain fear. “We reel from the sheer bewildering frenzy of such a world and wonder how to cope in both the short and the long haul. We need sanctuaries, sacred spaces, and places of safe retreat and balm very close to home, places of prayer, consolation and the company of those who understand” (Rasmussen, 1993, p. 163). This haven, however, is not to be confused with reactionary withdrawal but is a place that includes those on the periphery of our communities where people are present to one another in times of trouble and joy. With a preferential option for the suffering, such religious communities will act in solidarity to forge continuous relationships grounded in compassion and mutual accountability, around tables of hospitality.

Religious life is lived in relationship with God, the earth community, and others. The religious vocation for living well in the community of life is sustained by spiritual practices – hospitality, Sabbath-keeping, discernment, and dying well, to name a few (Bass, 1997). Spiritualities of compassion build our capacity to be present to one another and to work tenaciously for the well-being of all. Compassion connects us across differences without obliterating them; it is the work of dialogue and silence – of loving God and neighbour with heart, body, mind, and spirit (Mark 12:28-34).

Theologically, justice and well-being are God’s desire for humanity and for all of the created order. For religious life, our dedication to God is our dedication to participatory justice. Our dedication to participatory justice embodies our dedication to the ways of God. It means “bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and social positions while at the same time constructing a firm identity as participants in the process based on respecting separate identities” (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 18). No one is excused from accountability to human and ecological well-being. We learn justice as regard – as respect for persons as being of worth and value and as responsibility by participating in it. Learning to love one’s neighbour as oneself involves creating access to various life-sustaining resources according to need and circumstances.

Healthy communities, therefore, require adequate participation: all people affected by decisions should participate in the decisions that will affect their lives. Everyone needs the opportunity to join in the naming and shaping of the common good. Justice arrives when no one is treated as lesser than another because of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, bodily or mental ability, class, or any other social marker. In this perspective, community requires justice and diversity. Then “them” becomes “us.” For example, our prayers and conversations would include these words: “those of us who live with disabilities...who are Aboriginal, Black, Caucasian, Korean...those of us who are children, youth, elders...those of us who live with mental illness or are intellectually disabled...those of us who are gay,
lesbian, bisexual or transgendered...let us pray for those of us who struggle to put food on the table by mid-month because we are kept in poverty.”

Salvation is sometimes described as wholeness. It is also derived from the Latin, meaning to be rescued or to be safe. No one is saved alone. Building communities that are inclusive requires naming accurately what is going on, repenting of what we do wrong, living with mercy and forgiveness, and finding allies for transformation. The challenge is to risk participating in communities that offer support to engage difference and otherness constructively, with compassion. Hence, the term “inclusive communities” is plural to emphasize the multiplicity and variability of identities. To see the flaws in shared systems of values and behaviours requires difference, and a thorough engagement with other communities and with other ways of acting and knowing.

Ritual and worship in community help move us from belief into practice when they define what is wrong, bind us to community through shared images and common meanings, and invite us to reknit our selves and link with wider history. Also important are when they call us to participate with a cherished or surprising idea and it connects us to the universal. For example, in his dedication of the offering in a congregational worship service, Hallett Llewellyn prayed:

> We recognize your call, God, to share the resources of the world. We recognize the need we have in the West to break the cycle of greed and consumerism that is destroying others and ourselves. We recognize the cry of others to be in solidarity and partnership in the remaking and recreating of life in the Spirit of Christ. These offerings are part of that recognition and an expression of our will to journey in faith, anticipating your companionship on the way. Bless what we bring for the sake of your kingdom. Amen. (Hallett Llewellyn, Trinity-St. Paul’s Pastoral Charge, April 14, 2002)

This pastoral moment underscores criteria for communities with a spirituality of resistance (Culp, 1995, p. 174). We would do well to remember, therefore, that community is as potentially dangerous as it is life-giving. Communities will flourish when shaped by respect for difference and a passion for justice, calling forth resistance to all that thwarts human and cosmic well-being and solidarity. Liberative spiritualities of sharing (Soelle, 1993) and of abundance and enoughness (Bass, 1997, p. 58) direct us to participate with others in a world filled with violence and compassion, where there is both alienation and deep interdependence. The critical task of forging bonds of renewed community is to analyze and to protest against the systemic, particularly the political economic arrangements, that pervasively perpetuate and deepen social inequities and destroy creation. The constructive task nurtures participation and sustenance in various communities seeking justice and healing as the basis for solidarity and imagining an earth community where all will live with respect in creation.
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