



Cultivate an open mind

For Immediate Release

For a review copy of the book
or an interview with the author,
please contact Dottie DeHart,
DeHart & Company Public Relations,
at (828) 325-4966 or DSDeHart@aol.com.

A 21st Century Renaissance? Seven Signs That Our Values Are Evolving—Rapidly—Toward a Closer Fit with Reality

If you're wringing your hands over all the bad news you keep hearing, you can stop now. Things really aren't going to hell in a hand basket! In fact, says author Jim Kenney, our world is in a period of accelerated cultural evolution—and he offers some compelling evidence to prove it.

Chicago, IL (August 2010)—Are we living in an age of moral growth or moral decay? Is American culture evolving or devolving? Most of us would prefer to believe the former in both cases. But frankly, the turmoil of life in the early 21st century—the Gulf oil spill and other ecological disasters, global violence, political division, economic turbulence—makes it hard to be hopeful.

Take heart, says author Jim Kenney. When you understand the big picture, you'll see that we're actually living through a time of dramatic cultural evolution—a sea change. The old values of patriarchy, racism, war mongering, and exploitation of nature are giving way to new values of gender equality, human rights, nonviolence, and ecological awareness.

To put it another way, we're connecting with reality. We're getting real. And it's happening at a dizzying rate.

“We're not changing biologically, but our culture, our ‘social skin,’ is changing to fit the complex and potentially wonderful times in which we live,” says Kenney, author of *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change* (Quest Books, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-8356087-6-3, \$16.95, www.interreligiousinsight.org, www.cg.org). “We're in the middle of a 21st century Renaissance—and yet we are often so preoccupied with simply ‘coping’ that we can't see the dramatic, positive changes that are unfolding all around us.”

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Admittedly, there's no shortage of bad—even terrible—news. But according to Kenney, much of it is just an expression of the turbulence created by the clash between the declining wave of “older values” and the ascending wave of “new values.”

“We're at a period of crossing right now, and by necessity it's a time of great chaos,” he explains. “That's what happens when identities are questioned and existing power structures are threatened. From the turbulence, disruptive ‘eddies’ of resistance will emerge...but no eddy ever reversed the flow of a new stream.” **(NOTE TO EDITOR: See attached tipsheet.)**

Many people focus on the seemingly intractable problems that seem to confront us at every turn and reject this optimistic viewpoint out of hand. Kenney calls them “naysayers.” On the other hand, there are *also* plenty of “yeasayers”: activists, spiritual seekers, and change agents who embrace the notion that we're living in a time of major cultural advance.

“All around us there are signs that we're living in an age of accelerated cultural growth,” says Kenney. “To become a yeasayer, you just need to look with eyes of clarity and hope.”

Here, he identifies a few of the major signposts:

1. We're experiencing unprecedented levels of public outrage and grief over the oil spill. Have you noticed how angry everyone is over the callousness, incompetence, and lack of oversight that led to the Gulf catastrophe? Further, have you noticed the collective dismay and concern people are expressing for the ecological destruction and the social and economic dispossession that the spill has caused? Yes, these are normal, healthy responses to a tragedy—but according to Kenney, had the spill happened 50 years ago, it's likely that the public would have been far more apathetic.

“We've come a long way,” says Kenney. “Despite plenty of evidence of our failing stewardship on the part of governments and corporations, we are reconnecting with the Earth. In fact, 70 percent of Americans think of themselves as environmentalists. Now whether that description really fits most people is debatable, but that's beside the point. What matters is that we're thinking about it. And in many cases, our kids are our teachers and our conscience in this arena.

“If you really want to see evidence of the cultural revolution, envision taking up the environmental conversation with your grandparents,” he adds. “Now, imagine striking up the same conversation with your great-grandchildren. You'll have to agree there's a night and day difference in the tone and content of these hypothetical conversations.”

2. Our global ambassador is a woman—one who came very close to being elected president of the United States. When you consider the fact that 100 years ago women didn't yet have the right to vote, you can appreciate the massive change that Hillary Clinton represents. Clearly, while patriarchy (the “men are superior in every way” attitude) is not gone, it has lost its legitimacy worldwide.

“Name a region of the world where women are not organizing and moving into positions of influence,” challenges Kenney. “You can’t? Well, do you know anyone who’d like to invest in ‘sexism’ futures? My guess is no.”

3. An African-American man sits in the Oval Office. No, racism is not yet dead, but it’s clearly on its way out. Barack Obama could never have been elected, otherwise. And a glance at any group of young people tells the real story: while people in the older generations have had to struggle to overcome their own racial prejudices, the youth coming of age today never had those prejudices to begin with.

“By the way, social scientists have largely abandoned the term ‘race’ as meaningless, given the extraordinary genetic mixing of the Earth’s peoples,” notes Kenney. “Increasingly, race just isn’t an issue.”

4. Social and economic justice and human rights have become the most significant themes in the modern global conversation. Whether we focus on ecological disasters, earthquakes, famines, or social violence, the global response is far more powerful than it was just a decade or two ago. In other words, when bad things happen anywhere in the world, we care—and many of us back that caring up with action.

“In 1900, the world’s great thinkers did not acknowledge the existence of ‘universal human rights,’” says Kenney. “Today, the whole world knows that certain things must be done for *every* human being, while certain other things must never be done to *any* human being. Again, a mere hundred years later, our values have undergone a massive shift.”

5. War is no longer “inevitable.” Consider the fact that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was preceded by gigantic protests in many of the world’s capitals. The demonstrations dwarfed global reaction to the Vietnam War. Former UN Assistant Secretary General Robert Muller referred to the millions taking to the streets as “a new superpower.” He added, “Never before in the history of the world has there been a global, visible, public, viable, open dialogue and conversation about the very legitimacy of war.”

Those who ask, “Why didn’t the protests succeed?” just don’t understand the nature of a real social movement, says Kenney. They might as well ask, “Why didn’t the March on Selma work?”

“Around the world, diplomats, scholars, and peace activists are sounding the same note: ‘Modern war is obsolete,’” he adds. “It certainly hasn’t disappeared, but it’s losing its legitimacy. The long-cherished notion of the ‘just war’—waged only as a very last resort and not threatening the lives or property of non-combatants—has vanished in the face of extreme modern military killing power. Ironically, the more powerful the war machine becomes, the harder it is to use with precision.”

As Joseph Nye, former dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, puts it: “War remains possible, but it is much less acceptable now than it was a century or even a half century ago.” Nye and others argue that “soft power”—diplomatic, exemplary, persuasive influence—not “hard power” is the key to global peace. U.S. policy in Afghanistan increasingly reflects this shift.

6. Yes, there's a rise in religious fundamentalism...but it's a classic "eddy" that hides the huge progress we're making in the other direction. In other words, there's a far more meaningful rise of interreligious dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. Jim Kenney has been involved in that movement for the past 25 years.

"My experiences inform my persuasive argument that the great faith traditions are converging, not in belief but in cooperative common action to fight poverty, hunger, social injustice, violence, and environmental abuse," he says. "Over the last two decades, a global interreligious movement has taken shape, bringing together groups, communities, activists, leaders, and the faithful to work on building a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world."

Since 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions (which Kenney headed for many years) has convened huge working gatherings—in Chicago, Cape Town, Barcelona, Monterey, and Melbourne—where thousands of people from every imaginable religion come together to design and implement new cooperative projects and initiatives to nurture non-violent conflict resolution, defend human rights, and protect the Earth. Religions for Peace is another global interreligious group that works closely with the United Nations and peacemakers around the world to bring the influence of the great religious traditions to bear in peace-building.

"There are countless others," adds Kenney. "Hundreds of religious and interreligious activist groups are listed as UN-affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs). And the movement grows stronger every day."

7. We're globalizing from the bottom up. Most people are familiar with "top-down" globalization, with its destructive effects on local economies and cultural homogenization. Yet we're also beginning to witness globalization from the bottom up, notes Kenney. This movement brings activists, experts, and local communities together with intergovernmental agencies (UN, WTO, and so forth) to craft real alternatives to balance the "McDonald's-ization" of the world.

"All over the developing world, nongovernmental groups, individual activists, and intergovernmental agencies are working to create new options for the poor and a wide range of alternatives to Northern economic and cultural domination," Kenney writes. "Empowered by Internet-based communications, the new globalization shares resources and problem-solving techniques and creates new partnerships between individuals and groups that can work closely together without frequent and costly face-to-face meetings."

Clearly, all of this is good news, and there's more. Much more. And what's equally clear is that by focusing on this and other good news—by joining the yeasayer camp—you'll be much happier living in the 21st century Renaissance. Kenney says that's why he wrote *Thriving in the Crosscurrent* in the first place—to provide a welcome sense of perspective.

“I wanted to give readers a startling new way of looking at the swirl of everyday happenings and global events,” he says. “People have an innate need to seek the meaning in what seems to be meaningless and the reason behind what is so chaotic and confusing. This book is meant to offer a hopeful explanation for much that seems inexplicable and hopeless.”

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About the Author:

Jim Kenney has been recognized for decades as a leader in the global movement for intercultural understanding. Working to promote harmony and cooperative action among the world’s religious communities, he had a major role in the two largest interreligious gatherings ever held, the 1993 and 1999 Parliaments of the World’s Religions (Chicago and Cape Town). He was global director of the Parliament from 1995 to 2002; and, in 2002, he founded the Interreligious Engagement Project, helping global interreligious communities address critical planetary issues.

Kenney is the cofounder and executive director of Common Ground, an adult educational center offering a wide range of programs on the great cultural, religious, philosophical, and spiritual traditions and their implications for every dimension of human experience. He is also cofounder and coeditor of *Interreligious Insight: A Journal of Dialogue and Engagement* and, from 1988 to 2009, was consulting editor and a regular contributor to *Conscious Choice*, an alternative-living magazine based in Chicago.

For over thirty years, Jim has lectured widely on political, social, religious, and cultural issues. Over the past decade, his research and writing have focused on cultural evolution: how human societies adapt—sometimes dramatically—to a changing world. *Thriving in the Crosscurrent* is the pinnacle of that work.

For more information, please visit www.interreligiousinsight.org and www.cg.org.

About the Book:

Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change (Quest Books, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-8356087-6-3, \$16.95, www.interreligiousinsight.org, www.cg.org) is available at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers.

A Yeasayer's Action Guide: Thirteen Ways to Be the (Sea) Change You Want to See

By Jim Kenney, author of *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change* (Quest Books, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-8356087-6-3, \$16.95, www.interreligiousinsight.org, www.cg.org)

If you're committed to the idea of a cultural "sea change," you're what Jim Kenney, author of *Thriving in the Crosscurrent*, calls a "yeasayer." But is there anything you can actually do to move the evolutionary process along? Absolutely yes, asserts Kenney. Here, he offers yeasayers (and those who have their doubts but are at least open to the concept) a few action steps to get them started:

Reorient Yourself to a Changing World.

Learning the language of cultural evolutionary sea change is essential for several reasons. It deepens clarity and nurtures hope. It provides a lens through which we can much more accurately view our changing times. It's a great source of comfort in our angst-ridden age.

- Understand the two-wave model: the crossing of the declining, long-dominant older value wave and the rising newer wave. (*Thriving in the Crosscurrent* offers a thorough explanation.)
 - Honor the best of the older wave. Justice, fairness, honesty, loyalty, patriotism, kindness, and many other essential virtues have a place in both the older and the newer wave. In other words, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater."
- Know the anomalies. These are the surprising observations that tell us there's something wrong with many of our prevailing values and assumptions. For example, we've learned that men are *not* superior to women, that the concept of "race" is mostly fiction, that humans really can damage the Earth irreparably, that more than one religion might be valid, that we cannot simply ignore issues of justice and human rights. Each of these realizations counters a longstanding cultural assumption. Each appears as an "anomaly," an unsettling but necessary truth.
- Don't mistake eddies for new wave values. Some of the most disturbing phenomena of our time are *not* new values, but patterns of resistance to change. (**NOTE TO EDITOR: See "Exploring the Eddies" tipsheet.**)
- Familiarize yourself with the emergent values of the newer wave. Remember "P, J, S": peace, justice, and ecological sustainability.

Educate Yourself.

- Learn as much as you can about one or more emerging new wave concerns. Human rights, ecology, and gender equity are good examples.
- Learn one thing every month about "what's working" in the struggle to make a better world.

For example:

- Nonviolent conflict resolution: "the Season for Nonviolence" (www.agnt.org/snv2010/SNVintro.htm)
- The best in ecological stewardship (www.grist.org)
- The UN Millennium Development Goals project (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

Engage Others.

- Learning is only part of the process; it all comes together when we share new information and understanding with family, friends, colleagues, and others. “Learn and share” is the mantra of the sea change agent. At every stage of your growing understanding, concern, and commitment, make sure you bring along at least one other person. Learning and sharing deepens confidence, provides confirmation, and generates the energy to take the next step.
- Become a voice of clarity: Learn and share cutting-edge information about the 21st century sea change. Become a source of hope: Seek out and share evidence of values and behaviors that are really changing for the better.
 - Learn what to watch for...watch and pass it on.
 - Become an amateur expert in one area of new wave value shift (identify, absorb, pass it on).
 - Join the “Sea Change Blog Discussion” (underway by October 1, 2010, at www.seachanges.net).
- Recruit a partner or two or three...or open up a network to share information, inspiration, and ideas for cooperative common action.
 - Use your Facebook or Twitter account to build a conversation. Watch it grow into a network.
- Draw on your developing social network to create a modest action group, whose members might resolve to take and share one exemplary step each month. For example:
 - Volunteering in a neighborhood cleanup.
 - Working in a food pantry.
 - Starting a letter-writing campaign for human rights.

Do Your Part to Change the World.

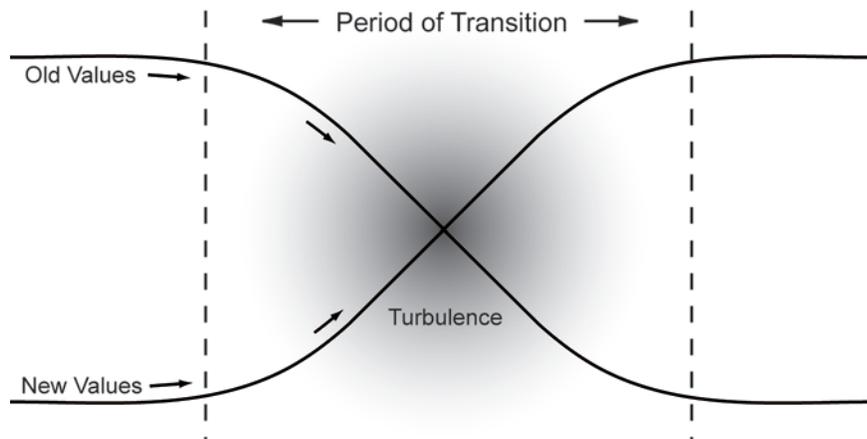
- Understand the difference between events you can’t change (like the Gulf disaster) and creative responses you can support or join in.
- Find an area where you can be a catalyst. Identify a P, J, S cause where you can make even a small difference. Find an opening and take an initial step. For example:
 - Read an important and inspiring book and pass it on to a friend.
 - Make a financial contribution to a “sea change” project.
 - Organize a discussion and action group.
 - Volunteer your time.
 - Write a letter to your government representatives, to an individual or a group making a difference, or to the media.
- Now take another step: Adopt a problem and make a personal commitment. Engage your friends, your network. For example:
 - Poverty and hunger in your own city or region: Help a public agency assist one struggling family.
 - Invest the price of a tank of gas in the Gulf cleanup.
 - Adopt a group. Find at least one NGO or other group that is making a “sea change” difference somewhere in the world. Find out how you can help...financial contributions are wonderful, but there’s often a way to become more personally involved. Tell your friends about your commitment.

Exploring the Eddies: How to Make Sense of the Turmoil That's Rocking Our World

By Jim Kenney, author of *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change* (Quest Books, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-8356087-6-3, \$16.95, www.interreligiousinsight.org, www.cg.org)

Jim Kenney has bad news and good news. First the bad: Yes, there are many deeply disturbing cultural problems—rampant incivility, race-based hate groups, unchecked corporate greed, violent acts of terrorism—swirling all around us. Now for the good: These phenomena are temporary *eddies*, whirlpools of resistance to the massive wave of cultural change we're currently experiencing.

“We're living at a time of crossing,” explains Kenney, author of *Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change* (Quest Books, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-8356087-6-3, \$16.95). “The old wave is declining, and the new wave is ascending, and as they come together, they create turbulence, which in turn gives birth to eddies—reactive counterflows that can slow but not stem the new tide.”



Once you realize the world really *isn't* going to hell in the proverbial hand basket—that this difficult time will pass and things will improve—it's much easier to live with a sense of serenity and acceptance in a time of cultural sea change. That's why Kenney has provided a few keys to understanding what eddies really are and where they come from.

“*Thriving in the Crosscurrent* describes three basic types of eddies,” he notes. “And each has various manifestations—forms of resistance to one of the major values of the newer wave.”

Eddy Type #1: Cultural Confusion

“What’s happening in my world? I don’t understand it anymore!”

Manifestations:

- *Incivility* (from road rage to classroom chaos to a perceived decline in interpersonal respect)
- *Relativism, apathy, anomie* (“There is no truth, just opinion. Your ideas are no better or worse than mine. Nothing matters. I don’t owe anybody anything. Your problems don’t concern me.”)
- *Sense of moral decay* (the widely shared, but largely incorrect, view that our cultural morals are in decline)
- *“Truthiness” instead of truth* (“spinning” in the eddy)
- *Pseudo-science* (“Evolution is only a theory. Global climate change is a scientific hoax.”)
- *Pseudo-history* (“Thomas Jefferson didn’t really believe in the separation of church and state.”)

Eddy Type #2: Identity Crisis

“Who am I? What does it mean to be me in this crazily spinning world?”

Manifestations:

- *Feeling no “respect”* (“What does it mean to be a white man in America anymore?”)
- *Defining oneself in terms of others’ perceived faults* (“At least I’m not...black, white, a Jew, a Muslim, a Christian, a woman, a liberal, etc.”)
- *Intolerance* (of other religions, ethnic groups, political positions, “elites,” etc.; fundamentalisms of all sorts grow out of identity crisis)
- *Fear and anger* (blaming others for my crisis of identity)
- *Finding a new “identity”* (in the gang, the mob, the hate group, or the Tea Party)
- *Hyper-chauvinism* (“patriotism” out of control)
- *Violence* (lashing out at the other who is “to blame” for my existential pain; terrorism finds its roots in identity crisis)

Eddy Type #3: Threats to Wealth and Power

“It’s all ours. We won’t give up our riches or our control!”

Manifestations:

- *The rise of the buccaneers: Greed is good!* (the modern “culture of greed” emerges from the turbulence of cultural value shift: “Now’s the time to take mine!”)
 - *Resistance to social and economic justice* (because it interferes with profit)
 - *Denial of environmental/ecological crisis* (because it might threaten wealth accumulation)

- *The rise of the dominators* (the response of the politically powerful to a multitude of threats embodied in the new wave: rising democracy, multi-lateralism, the diminishing legitimacy of war, global demands for human rights, the empowerment of women, etc.)
 - *Neo-imperialism* (the latest incarnation of nationalism in pursuit of world domination)
 - *Regional tyranny* (the “tin-pot dictator”: rarer but perhaps more dangerous than ever in our globalizing world)
 - *Manipulation of ethnic antipathy, violence, and terrorism* (the world’s buccaneers and dominators churning the waters for their own ends)

Four Deadly Spins: The Worst of the Worst

In a sea change, new swirls of resistance arise and dissipate ceaselessly. Most are relatively harmless. Some pose more serious threats to the disoriented. Still others are powerful enough to generate widespread cultural turbulence, entrapping those who stray within reach. Of these more virulent surges, there are four that are particularly troubling, notes Kenney.

“These are the worst of the eddies,” he explains. “Each is a powerfully dangerous way to harness *cultural confusion* and *identity crisis*. Two are ideologies, or inflexible patterns of belief. The other two are oligarchies, or concentrations of power in the hands of the destructive few.”

They are:

1. **Fundamentalism** (“My truth makes your beliefs irrelevant and even diabolical.”)
2. **Fascism** (ultranationalist populism that seeks to return to an imagined past)
3. **Globalizing Greed** (the unbridled self-entitlement of the “buccaneers”; manipulators of the “free market”; eco-abusers; the worst of the Wall Streeters)
4. **Unbridled Hegemony** (the arrogant tyranny of the would-be dominators, from the neo-imperialists to the regional tyrants to the manipulators of terrorists)

“Just remember, eddies are not part of the new wave,” asserts Kenney. “They are patterns of resistance to the decline of older values and the rise of newer ones. Yes, they’re dangerous—sometimes extremely so. But they are also temporary. That knowledge provides a reassuring context and allows you to weather the 21st century sea change with strength and grace.”

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**For more information, please contact Dottie DeHart,
DeHart & Company Public Relations, at (828) 325-4966 or DSDeHart@aol.com,
or visit www.interreligiousinsight.org or www.cg.org.**