

Working Paper

Sustainability, Faith, and the Market

Lloyd E. Sandelands

Stephen M. Ross School of Business
at the University of Michigan
Email: lsandel@umich.edu

Andrew Hoffman

Stephen M. Ross School of Business
at the University of Michigan
Email: ajhoff@umich.edu

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Lloyd E. Sandelands and Andrew J. Hoffman

University of Michigan

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a major force within today's market environment. But, there remains much confusion about what exactly the term means and much dissatisfaction at the limited successes that have been achieved. In this paper, we argue that the idea of sustainability that today informs academic and policy debate about economic development is too small. The solutions it proposes draw on the same logic and beliefs that created the problem in the first place, and will be limited in its ability to achieve its ends. Thus, present calls for sustainability have neither the vision nor the authority to sustain us in the relationships that define our human being; specifically our relationship to self, our relationship to others in society, and our relationship to nature. We argue for a bigger idea of sustainability that puts these relationships into their true context of our being in God. In particular, we identify the idea of sustainability with four principles of Catholic theology—which we label *anthropic*, *relational*, *ethical*, and *divine love*—and we identify the practice of sustainable development with eight principles of Catholic social doctrine—which the Church labels *unity and meaning*, *common good*, *universal destination*, *subsidiarity*, *participation*, *solidarity*, *social values*, and *love*. With this bigger idea of sustainability, which lies at the center of Christian teaching, we imagine that public discussion about sustainability can be transformed—from a gloomy and contentious movement based on a politics of fear, to a bright and cooperative humanism based on a politics of hope. At the end of the day we learn what we should perhaps have known all along—that we are sustained by faith.

“Sustainability” is an idea whose time seems to have come. It is a “cause” for culture critics and broadcast journalists, a talking point for politicians, and perhaps most consequentially, an urgent agenda item for big business. Indeed, corporations are printing annual “Sustainability Reports”, inserting the term into press releases and CEO speeches, creating new positions such as the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO), and gathering for conferences on the “sustainability challenge.” A recent Accenture survey found that 87% of Fortune 1000 CEOs believe sustainability is important to a company’s profits and that 89% believe sustainability will be a significant issue in the next three years. Corporations are eager to take the measure of sustainability, at least in hopes they will not be overtaken by it, and more to the point, in hopes they can turn it to their advantage. But what exactly are these groups talking about? What is sustainability? While the idea is everywhere, its meaning remains nebulous and contested. Indeed, more than one cynic has complained that if the idea means whatever anyone wants it to mean, then it may mean nothing at all.

There can be no doubt that the growing movement for sustainability today is well-intentioned—it aims for (1) a perpetually stable resource base, involving no depletion of natural resources or ecosystems (and possibly even an expansion of these), and (2) a perpetually stable social system predicated upon just standards of living and security for all. But meaningful progress in these terms has yet to materialize. While the movement to date has been long on warnings about the ecological and social disaster to come, it has been short on altering the present for future good. As John Ehrenfeld (2004) points out, being less unsustainable is not the same as being more sustainable.

In this article, we ask what keeps the sustainability movement from its aims. Our thesis is that too many calls for sustainability lack the resolve and authority required to bring the economy, the environment, and society into sustainable relations. We argue that the focus of many academics, policy-makers, and executives upon the use of market forces and/or government regulations to promote sustainable development is too narrow and concedes too much to private interests, such as those of producers, consumers, and nations. Sustainability is not to be achieved by economic or governmental policy reasoning alone. The problems run much too deep and are “a result of systemic failures of capitalism that we have today,” such that “long-term solutions must seek transformative change in the key features of this contemporary capitalism” (Speth, 2008: 9). Needed is reasoning inspired and informed by faith (Tucker & Grim, 2007). Needed is recognition of sustainability’s theological requirement—namely, that human development defer to that highest authority that comprehends not just private goods but the good of all creation. Absent such deference, the private interests that put the economy at odds with society and the environment cannot be expected to bring them into right relation. The abiding lesson of the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968) is that self-interest is not self-correcting. In this article, we argue that we cannot save ourselves except with God help.

Sustainability in Today's World

To borrow a phrase from song-writer Bob Dylan, “the times, they are a’ changing.” Everywhere there are indications of unhappiness and sometimes even rebellion at the impacts of the economy on society and the environment. The problems are clear, and solutions are being proposed. But the solutions are flawed, criticized from the left and the right, and the problems only worsen (Speth, 2008). There is no shortage of well-meaning advocates who are engaged and determined to make a difference. But their efforts mostly tinker at the edges of a market system that is itself flawed. Let’s take a look at how these pieces all fit together.

The problem. The past century has witnessed unprecedented economic growth and human prosperity. World population increased by a factor of four; the world economy increased by a factor of fourteen (Thomas, 2002); global per capita income tripled (World Business Council on Sustainable Development, 1997); and average life expectancy increased by almost two-thirds (World Resources Institute, 1994). In the US alone, life expectancy rose from 47.3 to 77.3 between the years 1900 and 2002 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004).

But, while these and other advances are notable, widening income disparities mean that not all people share in the material and economic progress of the past century. According to the United Nations, the richest 20% of the world’s population consume 86% of all goods and services while the poorest 20% consume just 1.3%. In fact, the richest three people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries. Of the 4.4 billion people in the developing world, almost 60% lack access to safe sewers, 33% do not have access to clean water, 25% lack adequate housing and 30% have no modern health services (Crossette, 1998).

At the same time, the past century has witnessed unprecedented human impacts on the natural environment. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a study commissioned by the United Nations and involving more than 1,360 experts worldwide, concluded that humans have changed the Earth’s ecosystems over the past 50 years “more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history” (2005: 1). Of the 24 global ecosystem services that were analyzed, 60% were found to be degraded or used unsustainably. Humans have increased the species extinction rate by as much as 1,000 times over background rates typical over the planet’s history. In the last 100 years, 816 species have become extinct and 11,046 more are threatened with extinction (United Nations, 2001). Nearly 25% of the world’s most important marine fish stocks are depleted, over harvested, or just beginning to recover from over harvesting. Another 44% are being fished at their biological limit and are, therefore, vulnerable to depletion (World Resources Institute, 2000). The global rate of deforestation averaged nine million hectares per year in the 1990s (World Resources Institute, 2001).

In short, the exploitative relationship between the economy and the natural and social environment—that took shape in the industrial revolution of the 19th century and

that has grown with globalization of industrial production in this century—cannot be sustained. We are today in the throes of a commons tragedy of global proportions.

The proposed solution. The Brundtland Commission report -- *Our Common Future* -- is generally credited with coining the term “sustainable development” which it defined as “meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The report called for economic growth to be pursued in a manner that assures the protection of both social and environmental systems. These system considerations have both inter-generational and intra-generational components. Future generations must be left with an ecologically viable and socially stable planet upon which to live. Present generations must be accorded an equal opportunity for economic security as well as the fair distribution of environmental costs and benefits (Farrell and Hart, 1998). For these things to happen, the links between environmental degradation and economic activity in the developing world must be severed (Hart, 1995).

Putting such goals into practice within the market remains a challenge. Many view the Brundtland Commission definition as more of an aspiration, but lacking in the texture necessary to guide action. Their point is well taken. At the root of the word “sustainability” is the verb “to sustain.” This verb has the logical property, identified by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949), of being an achievement rather than a specific action or process. Achievement verbs, according to Ryle, “do not stand for perplexingly undetectable actions or reactions, any more than “win” stands for a perplexingly undetectable bit of running, or ‘unlock’ for an unreported bit of key turning” (p. 152). Running and key-turning are task verbs that refer to actual processes: winning and unlocking are achievement verbs that refer to outcomes that running and key-turning can have. Thus, if our aim is to achieve sustainability, it remains to identify the actions and tasks that make that achievement possible. To this end, John Elkington (2004) introduced the notion of the triple bottom line (TBL) as a way to give greater specificity to the concept of sustainability. His notion is that companies should attend to and strive to maximize three bottom lines. These are referred to as the 3 e’s (equity, environment and economy) or the three p’s (people, planet and profit).

Criticisms of the proposed solution. Calls for sustainable development and balancing the TBL have drawn criticism, both from the left and from the right, and both from advocates and opponents. The harshest criticisms come from those who believe that such calls misappropriate the purpose of the corporation and are contrary to the true intentions of capitalism. For example, *The Economist* magazine published a cover story in January 2005 that derided sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as misguided concepts driven by people with little knowledge or a downright fear of capitalism. And as some companies have begun taking constructive actions to address environmental degradation, others have openly resented and derided these actions. For example, when the founding corporations of the US Climate Action Partnership, a consortium of ten blue-chip corporations (including DuPont, Alcoa, BP America, GE, Lehman Brothers, PG&E and others, including two environmental NGOs) called for federal standards on greenhouse gas emissions in early 2007, a *Wall Street Journal*

editorial ridiculed them as the “10 jolly green giants” and challenged their motives as being sinister. In 2005, when General Electric announced plans to publish its first “Citizenship Report,” the *Wall Street Journal* was again critical that environmentalists had made their “biggest catch yet” and pondered whether “capitalists are abandoning capitalism” (Murray, 2005: A2).

On the opposite extreme, some advocates of sustainability argue that the concept as it is presently envisaged does not go far enough. They argue that it is nothing but a label for actions or strategies that are actually driven by the standard social, economic and institutional mechanisms (Jacobs, 1993). Thus while they concede that there are many ideas for reform—such as for increased transparency and increased accountability in markets and in environmental policy; for greater use of intelligent subsidies and market-based approaches to change; for elimination of perverse incentives; and for technologies that facilitate better relations with the environment—they believe that such remedies are necessarily limited in scope and impact. In a word, they see such as attempts to use the flawed tools of a flawed system to fix it. They remind us that blind adherence to metrics such as IRR and NPV is a large part of what got us into the social and environmental mess we’re now in. Such singular metrics as the TBL, they argue, obscure our broader responsibilities to our fellow man that cannot be easily measured, if at all. Thus it seems beyond optimistic to suppose that a new metric for sustainability could resolve the problem. And even if such could be identified, it seems beyond hopeful to suppose it would be embraced and used. In the end, such critics believe that economic growth remains the primary goal of development planning, while sustainability is diminished as a reluctant constraint (Colby, 1991). Rather than harmonizing economic, environmental and equity considerations into a synergistic whole, such critics believe the prevailing regimen remains that of making tradeoffs while holding to economic growth as the paramount objective.

Getting to the root of the problem. For sustainability to be achieved we must begin to think differently about economy, society, and environment. Sustainability challenges widely-held assumptions, including: the necessity of increasing economic growth; the perception of nature as a limitless source for materials and sink for wastes; the superiority of technological development for controlling natural systems; the social and physical autonomy of the firm; and the profit-motive as a singular objective of the firm (Capra, 1982; Daly & Cobb, 1994; Daly, 1991; Gladwin, Kennelly & Krause, 1995). In addition, sustainability challenges the moral precepts underlying debate about economic development. The Stern Report (2007) questions whether discounting the future is inherently immoral. George Soros questions whether the mobility of capital flows has an inherently moral component to it (Soros, 1998). Recent squabbles over patent rights to AIDS drugs in Africa question the preeminence of profit streams over human needs. And a growing list of companies are finding themselves the target of well-orchestrated campaigns to call attention to grievances through standard modes of business. Examples include: Royal Dutch Shell for dealings with a repressive regime in Nigeria and the hanging of writer Ken Siro-Wiwa; Nike for alleged use of slave labor in China; Wal-Mart for wages and health care in its U.S. stores; Coca-Cola for environmental issues in India and labor issues in Colombia; Caterpillar for the use of

their bulldozers by the Israeli army to demolish Palestinian homes; Exxon-Mobil for its resistance to action on climate change.

Before all, sustainability challenges the axiomatic idea that the market can and will provide for human needs and that corporations can and will provide for security and prosperity (Barnett, 2004). Can a sustainable world be guaranteed by the market's "invisible hand" that joins self-seeking buyers with profit-seeking suppliers? No doubt the invisible hand is invaluable, but is it enough? What else is there to the story? Citizens are more than consumers and care for more than selfish satisfactions. And business entrepreneurs are more than opportunists moved by avarice or cupidity. New questions are being raised that challenge the fundamentals of standard business practices. Within the halls of academe, questions are today being raised about the adequacy of economic theory in explaining business behavior (Khurana, 2007). Does it suffice to treat human relationships as transactions, human aspirations as market opportunities, human motivations as only pecuniary, and corporate social responsibility as limited to shareholders (e.g., Friedman, 1970)? Such logic dismisses calls for greater attention to environmental and social issues within market environments (see e.g., Meckling & Jensen, 1983) and in so doing disdains calls for sensitive attention to human persons (Sandelands, 2008). Where this logic imagines the economic system of market capitalism to be socially and morally inert, the problem of sustainability produced by this system today suggests otherwise.

The problem before us is that identified recently by economist Jeffrey Sachs (2008): "When it comes to problem solving on a global scale, we remained weighed down by cynicism, defeatism and outdated institutions." The question, unanswered by Sachs, is what is behind our cynicism, defeatism, and outdated institutions? We believe that this question can be answered only by returning to the idea of sustainability itself. In particular, we believe that too many of the calls to the good today rest on an inadequate concept of sustainability, a concept that does not recognize the deepest meaning of our lives. In the concluding chapter to their book, *Beyond the Limits*, scientists Meadows, Meadows and Randers (1992) argue that the solution to the environmental collapse predicted by their models is nothing short of love.

The sustainability revolution will have to be, above all, a societal transformation that permits the best of human nature rather than the worst to be expressed and nurtured ... [but] it is difficult to speak of or to practice love, friendship, generosity, understanding or solidarity within a system whose rules, goals, and information streams are geared for lesser human qualities ... collapse cannot be avoided if people do not learn to view themselves and others with compassion (pp. 233-234).

Without love, sustainability is but a "noisy gong or a clashing cymbal" (I Corinthians, 1:13). It is using market logics to solve problems of human meaning and value. The ultimate goals of sustainability reach to the depths of faith. They involve aspirations of a better life, equal opportunity, justice, security, community, responsibility and full realization of human potential (see World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; Farrell and Hart, 1998). For Ehrenfeld, sustainability is about

flourishing, and “flourishing means not only survival, but also the realization of whatever we humans declare makes life meaningful – individual satisfaction, dignity, freedom, justice” (2008). But, as long as solutions for sustainability draw on the same logic and beliefs that created the problem in the first place, these ultimate goals of sustainability cannot be fully realized. We must turn to matters of faith to take us to our ultimate end.

Sustainability in Full

So we return to the question: What is sustainability? We begin with what it is not. Sustainability is not as it is described in most academic or policy circles; it is not a state or condition of nature. Such an ecocentric view centers on the needs of nature and views man in light of these needs (Catton & Dunlap, 1980). Taking its cue from natural science, academic and policy thinking supposes that man is a natural being, that the environment, economy, and society are natural events subject to natural laws, and that sustainability is the state to which nature tends—that is, if only we recognize this fact and let it happen (Nordhaus & Shellenberger, 2007). This idea of sustainability is incoherent, for at least two reasons. First, by seeking sustainability in nature alone, this idea begs the question of what is sustained. Like a river that flows where it can, nature answers no authority. She cares not which species live and which die, which businesses succeed and which fail, and which individuals flourish and which flounder. Although nature abides, it sustains nothing. Second, by putting nature before man, this idea effectively denies the one source from which a sustainable purpose or goal could come. Man alone is the source and arbiter of value. Even when nature is said to have a purpose, such as the empty one of life itself, it is put there by man (who infers from his/her own being that everything has a purpose). Sustainability, therefore, is rather a distinctively human concern and as such above and beyond nature. Sustainability is literally “*super-natural*.” Human existence is above nature, both in its relationship to the environment and in its constitutive relationships of persons with one another. Indeed, this transcendent aspect is implied by the very idea (which we have no trouble understanding or accepting) that we have a “relationship” to nature. Only something outside of nature can be related to it. What is fully of nature—say a fungus, flower, or fish—cannot be related to it. This transcendent aspect is to see as well in our human relationships, which are not only or essentially natural occurrences of material cause and effect, but are “events” having meaning the material world.

Thus sustainability is an idea beyond the reach of the secular mind focused on nature. It is an idea at home, not in the natural world described by science, but in the moral world of Divine creation described by faith. Its concerns are distinctively human: 1) the human person made in God’s image, and 2) the human community likewise made in God’s image. Human life is sustained when it honors and respects these concerns. The value of sustainability includes not only our God-inflected relationship to the natural world, but even more our God-inflected relationship to one another and to our own self. Thus sustainability is bigger than nature and bigger than us, an idea that includes all being and extends beyond here and now to everywhere and to all time; in a word, an idea that reaches to the Divine all. Against the bend of modern thinking, which catastrophically sunders the natural from the spiritual and the secular from the sacred, the

idea of sustainability confronts us with the presence of God in the world. The reason why naturalistic calls to sustainability fail is because they do not speak to that part of our being that is human, to that part of us beyond nature, to that part of us that hungers for meaning, and for the transcendent absolute.

What is needed is a call to faith. Tucker (2003: 43) points out that “the environmental crisis calls the religions of the world to respond by finding their voice within the larger Earth community.” We agree, and for our part, we find meaning for sustainability in the theology of Roman Catholic Church to which we both belong. It is a meaning that we canvas with four theological principles, each of which builds upon its predecessor.

First, sustainability is an *anthropic principle* that it is brought into focus by the human person who was created by God in His image. In God’s love and by God’s design the cosmos is made for man and man is made for the cosmos. Thus, the idea of sustainability is as big as creation and is as important as man himself. Man’s creative will, which he receives as a gift from God, is ordered to the care and custody of creation. This idea places sustainability firmly in the realm of faith which reveals that God created man and blessed him saying “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1.28). But that mandate challenges us to seek harmony and not dominance over nature.

Second, and following upon the first, sustainability is a *relational principle* that concerns how persons relate to themselves, to each other, and to the world around them. The key to this principle is God upon whom all things depend for being. The God who made all things sustains all things. In Him, with Him, and through Him, we are sustained in all of the relationships that comprise our being. This principle and these relationships lead us to a tri-partite understanding of ourselves in which our humanity is defined not by the objective natural facts that we are a person related to self, a person related to others, and a person related to nature, but by a far greater fact; namely, that we are defined by our relationship to God. This understanding is to see in the three diagrams of Figure 1. These diagrams lead beyond the *human nature* and sustainability charted by science, in which God does not appear, to the *human being* and sustainability known to faith, in which God is paramount.

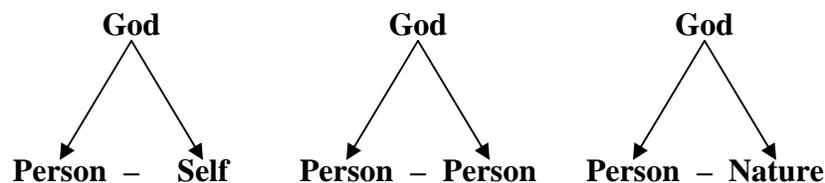


Figure 1: Sustainability in relation

According to Church teaching, it is *in, with, and through* God that we come into the fullness of our human being. We come into our individual person as we come into relation with God. Then we become as Christ, literally as per-son, “of son,” to God. As the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1941) has observed, our individual self-hood is rooted, not in our capacity for conceptual analysis, but in our capacity for self-transcendence (a capacity which reaches to God). Against this self-sustaining relation is the (sadly all too familiar) solipsism of “selfishness” in which we stand in barren relation to self. In the same way, we come into communion with others as we join them in transcendent relation with God. We are united as one in the bond we share with Him. Against this sustaining relation is the “impersonal market” imagined in economics (but fortunately never realized in practice) in which we seek to exploit others for selfish gain and in which we join with others in nothing more than a coincidence of interests. Lastly, and by the same token, we come into being with nature as she and we join in relation with God. As G.K. Chesterton (1908) so memorably observed:

Only the supernatural has taken a sane view of Nature. The essence of all pantheism, evolutionism, and modern cosmic religion is really in this proposition; that Nature is our mother. Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother you discover that she is a stepmother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother; Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate. (pp. 115).

Against this sustaining relation in which we seek God at the head of our relation to nature are the barren and distorting relations in which we either put our lives ahead of nature’s needs or else put nature’s needs ahead of our lives (see, e.g., Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005; Sandelands, 2005).

As noted, the Divine ground of our relationships is the key to their sustainability. Under God we are joined with self in a way that brings out our true being—in which self-interests are subsumed under the heart’s desire to be in God. Under God we are joined with all humankind (with all others, living, dead, and yet unborn) in a way that brings out our true communion—in which our good lies not in any Hobbesian war of “all against all” but in loving neighbor as self. And under God we are joined with nature in a way that recognizes both our involvement in nature and our involvement with God who is beyond nature. These are the sustainable relations of our lives; the relations that God wishes for us because they are in, with, and through Him. This relational aspect of sustainability is lost upon academic and policy thinking rooted in the social science of economics. Such thinking does not begin with an idea of the human person in relation to all things in God, but begins instead with a bereft idea of the economic actor as agent of rational self-interest. This agent is no person—no child of God—but a cipher whose existence is inimical to the relations that define human being.

The principle of relation suggests immediately a third *ethical principle* of the good. Sustainability is at once a fact and a value of our human being. In this respect it is akin to what is called Natural Law, which is law in both senses of the word; a description of what we are and a description of how we ought to behave. God made us good but left

us free to do evil. Our power to create—for good or for evil—comes as a gift of God’s own creative power which He relinquishes to us in freedom (Guardini, 1998). Thus, the good of sustainability is for us to choose. It is for us to choose to live in the sustainable relations described above, that God has defined for us, in which He is at the center of our being. The key to this ethical principle is the indispensable, but today very out of fashion, notion of sin (Niebuhr, 1941). In our God-given freedom, and in our God-given power to act as we will, we are always and everywhere called to decide whether we will obey or contravene His will for us. This ethical dimension, which we cannot escape, is the lesson and legacy of *Original Sin* by which our first parents, Adam and Eve, brought hardship and death into the world by disobeying God’s one commandment not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Ever since that fall we have been tempted to act as gods by deciding for ourselves what is only for the true God to decide; namely what is good and what is evil. Thus sustainable development is and must be a struggle to do God’s will (“Thy will be done”); in general a struggle against evil for the good; and in particular a struggle against the temptation to put self before God, a struggle against the temptation to objectify and exploit others rather than to love them as ourselves in God, and a struggle against the temptation to take advantage of nature rather than to love and respect her as our sibling in God’s creation.

Finally, and in sum of the principles before it, sustainability is a *principle of Divine love*. Sustainability is above all an expression God’s love for all of his creation and for all of his children. According to the Bible (Genesis 1.1-31), each act of creation ended with God seeing it good. And the last act, on the sixth day, was that of pure love in which God created man in His image, as a division within the unity of His being. In this connection we look back upon the three relations of sustainability described above—of person and self in God, of person and person in God, and of person and nature in God—to see that they carry Divine love forward into the world. They are instances of His eternal creation in, with, and through our human being. Revelation teaches that God is the source of eternal life. That is an instruction not only about life after death but even more about life during life, about our lives right here and right now. The highest reach of sustainability is God in whom we are reconciled to ourselves, to our fellow man, and to all of nature. His love—which is love itself—is our hope for fruitful and lasting relations of economy, society, and the environment.

Sustainability in Practice

In view of the theological roots of sustainability just described, we come at last to a practical idea of sustainable development informed by faith based in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC)* (2004). This doctrine consists of eight principles which together support our personal and social destiny in God—a destiny which, as we have seen, is the very essence of sustainability. While each principle is necessary, only the collection is sufficient as doctrine. And while each principle warrants an essay of its own, it must suffice in the pages remaining to lay them out as a group so to see in broad terms the Christian wisdom for sustainability.

1) *Meaning and Unity*. This first principle refers to the entire set, to insist the collection be appreciated in its “unity, interrelatedness, and articulation” (CSDC, 2004, p. 71). This is to recognize that man’s being in God is unitary and is to encourage and protect in all its aspects. Thus while individual principles refer variously to the person, to society, and to relations between the two, it must not be forgotten that person and society define one another as parts of God’s unitary creation. For sustainability this means that our obligation to our person cannot be separated from our obligation to others in society and that neither can be separated from our obligation to the environment.

2) *The Principle of the Common Good*. According to this principle: “A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good—the good of all people and of the whole person—as its primary goal” (CSDC, 2004, p. 73). For sustainability this means that economic activity must take place within the limits of the moral order and more particularly within God’s plan for humankind. Sustainability is a recognition of our responsibility to others, both in the present and in the future; both in our immediate surroundings and half way around the world. The greenhouse gases emitted in Ann Arbor, Moscow or Beijing affect the same atmosphere that we all depend on for life, both now and in to the future. “The fundamental finality of ...production,” according to the Church, “is not the mere increase of products nor profit or control but rather the service of man, and indeed of the whole man with regard for the full range of his material needs and the demands of his intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious life; this applies to every man whatsoever and to every group of men, of every race and of every part of the world” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, #64, p. 37). By this principle, the good of self-interest, which is so enshrined in business thinking today, cannot be all, or even first. Individual goods, including that of shareholders, must find their place within the super-ordinate good of humankind.

3) *The Universal Destination of Goods*. This is the principle that each and every person “must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development” (CSDC, 2004, p. 75). This is actually a two-handed principle: on one hand it confirms the necessity of private property as the ground upon which persons can make lives for themselves; on the other hand it recognizes that the earth and its resources are God’s gift to all humankind for all to share and enjoy. Thus while this idea substantiates an absolute right to property and capital, this right is not unlimited but is instead constrained by the no less important and no less absolute right that the goods of God’s gift to man be shared. For sustainability this means that a system of market capitalism based on private property is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Sustainability requires as well that capital not accumulate in ways that would deny any the well-being necessary for full development. Again, sustainability is a recognition of the over-riding imperative to protect and enhance the dignity of man. Destroying the environment or selfishly hoarding the majority of goods of this earth for a small minority is contrary to the dignity of man.

4) *The Principle of Subsidiarity*. According to this principle, “every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them” (CSDC, 2004, p. 81). This means that markets, business, and governments must do nothing to upset or limit the constitutive relations of human

being in God, and in particular those of person to self, person to person, and person to nature. This principle thus opposes several tendencies of economic life today. One is an exaggerated capitalism that puts acquisition and consumption before being in God. Another is an excessive instrumentalism that sees persons only as means rather than as ends unto themselves—thus to equate the value of person with what they produce rather than with who they are. A third is a distorted environmentalism that either puts man’s ambitions ahead of nature’s needs or that reverses this priority to put nature’s demands ahead of man’s needs. In her wisdom, the Church is not simply against capitalism, instrumentalism, or environmentalism—far from it—but she warns that these laudable expressions of the human will to “be fruitful and multiply” can become dangers when it is forgotten what they are for. The principle of subsidiarity reminds that such secondary goods are goods only when they serve the primary good which is man’s being in God.

5) *Participation*. This principle provides for “activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political, and social life of the civil community to which he belongs” (CSDC, 2004, p. 83). This principle carries a strong message for business at odds with the emphasis today upon shareholder capitalism. According to the Church:

In economic enterprises it is persons who are joined together, that is, free and independent human beings created in the image of God. Therefore, with attention to the functions of each—owners or employers, management or labor—and without doing harm to the necessary unity of management, the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of these enterprises in ways to be properly determined is to be promoted. Since more often, however, decisions concerning economic and social conditions, on which the future lot of the workers and of their children depends, are made not within the business itself but by institutions on a higher level, the workers themselves should have a share also in determining these conditions—in person or through freely elected delegates (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, #68, p. 39).

6) *The Principle of Solidarity*. This principle recognizes “the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights, and the common path of individuals and peoples toward an ever more committed unity” (CSDC, 2004, p. 84). In a word, there is a unity of unities to which all human enterprise must tend. For sustainability this means that businesses must act on behalf of the whole of humankind by producing goods that are truly “goods,” that add to rather than subtract from the life of persons and society. Questionable, therefore, are businesses that contribute to vice and dissipation (such as by fostering use of unhealthy drugs or pornography) or businesses that through aggressive advertising create empty or misplaced “needs” (such as by playing up insecurities about physical beauty or social status). For sustainability this means also that businesses must act in cooperation with others, even among those who are competitors. Thus, competition in business must not be, as some say, a Hobbesian “war of all against all;” but must be instead a spirited play in which all are ultimately held safe. Competitors are not prey to overwhelm by market power or predatory pricing, but

are loyal adversaries to welcome as a test of one's mettle in the marketplace. Competition should not be cooperation's opposite, but its sincerest form.

7) *The Fundamental Values of Social Life*. According to this principle, "all social values are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Essentially, these values are: truth, freedom, justice, love" (CSDC, 2004, p. 88). There can be no human dignity—no human person and no human society—without these values, which every person and society must therefore uphold. As these are the values written upon the human heart, sustainability requires that they be part of every human activity and relationship. It is telling, if not ironic, that these values are largely implicit and therefore invisible within most thinking about business economics. However, as Nobel economist Kenneth Arrow (1994) explains, modern economic theory rests upon an idea of "the market" that it cannot explain. This market, Arrow notes, presupposes values of truth, freedom, justice, and love as necessary conditions of economic exchange. Behind the selfish and sometimes brutal conduct called for by economic theories, there are to find the fundamental values for human dignity called for by God and propounded in faith by the Church.

8) *The Way of Love*. This final principle finds in love the "highest and universal criterion of the whole of social ethics. Among all paths, even those sought and taken in order to respond to the ever new forms of current social questions, the 'more excellent way' is that marked out by love" (CSDC, 2004, p. 91). True happiness "is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement...but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1995, #1723). This principle recognizes in the most general way possible what it is to be in God. As God is love, we are in God when we are in love. This love is a "many splendored thing" that begins in God and extends to every human relation and to every corner of existence. Even though it does not mention God by name, we find that this last principle of sustainability as love is well-encapsulated by Meadows, Meadows and Randers (1992) who lament:

One is not allowed in the modern culture to speak about love, except in the most romantic and trivial sense of the word. Anyone who calls upon the capacity of people to practice brotherly and sisterly love is more likely to be ridiculed than to be taken seriously. The deepest difference between optimists and pessimists is their position in the debate about whether human beings are able to operate collectively from a basis of love. In a society that systematically develops in people their individualism, their competitiveness, and their cynicism; the pessimists are in the vast majority. That pessimism is the single greatest problem of the current social system, we think, and the deepest cause of unsustainability (p. 233).

Conclusion

The secular scientific idea of sustainability that informs academic and policy debates about economic development today is too small for us. This idea

has neither the vision nor the authority to sustain us in the relationships that define our human being; and in particular, in our relationship to self, our relationship to others in society, and our relationship to nature. We imagine that this concept of sustainability has unintentionally invited, if it has not actually caused, the ongoing and discouraging stalemate between those for and against sustainable economic development.

What we have laid out in the pages of this article is a call for radical and transformative change; a call to acknowledge the moral and spiritual basis for the challenge of sustainability and move us beyond our preoccupation with purely economic and political reasoning and solutions. In so doing, we join with others who see a similar spiritual urgency. Thomas Berry (1999: 104) calls for “a profound reversal in our perspective on ourselves and on the universe about us.” Erich Fromm (1977: 137) argues that “only a fundamental change in human character from a preponderance of the having mode to a predominantly being mode of existence can save us.” Tucker and Grim (2007: 4) point out that “we are called to a new intergenerational consciousness and conscience.” The type of change that these writers call for can only be accomplished through the engagement of religious and spiritual thought. Indeed “no other group of institutions can wield the particular moral authority of the religions [of the world]” (Tucker, 2003: 9) and no other institutions are able to stand in the face of the powerful institutions of economics and policy. Without the engagement of religious faith, it is doubtful that solutions to the sustainability challenge can be found.

In that spirit, we have argued in this paper for a bigger idea of sustainability that engages us in the transcendent relationship at the very core of our being; namely our being in God. We found this idea in the theology and social doctrine of the Catholic Church. With this idea, which lies at the center of Christian teaching, we imagine and hope that public discussion about sustainability can be transformed, from a gloomy and contentious environmentalism based on a politics of fear, to a bright and shared humanism based on a politics of hope. With this Christian idea of sustainability we imagine and hope that we can resist the siren call of our lesser “angel” of self-interest (a demon we cannot rely upon to serve our good) and with full confidence answer instead the call of our better “angel” of faith in God (whose Holy Spirit raises the dignity of our human person to its full glory).

At the end of the day we learn what we should perhaps have known all along; that we are sustained by faith.

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