

Sustainability, Faith, and the Market

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Abstract

Although sustainability is a growing concern of business today, there has been little progress toward a sustainable future. This is because the idea of sustainability in academic and policy debates is too small and too beholden to the assumptions that have created today's environmental and development crises. Consequently, calls for reform have neither the vision nor the authority to sustain the relationships of self, society, and environment that define human life. Reaching beyond our profession of business management to our Christian faith, we argue for a bigger idea of sustainability that orients these relationships to God. We identify sustainability with four principles of Christian theology—which we label *anthropic*, *relational*, *ethical*, and *divine love*—and we link economic 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*. This bigger idea of sustainability transforms talk about the future from a gloomy contentiousness rooted in fear to a bright cooperation rooted in hope.

Keywords

sustainability, market, faith, God, Catholic Church

Sustainability is an idea whose time has 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

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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 even more 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 is 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.

Although today’s burgeoning movement for sustainability is well-intentioned—few would quibble with its aims for a perpetually stable resource base, and for a perpetually stable social system predicated upon just standards of living and security for all—it has yet to make substantial progress to these ends. Long on warnings about the ecological and social disaster to come, the movement is short on practical programs to alter 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. We find that too many of the calls for sustainability today lack the resolve and authority required to bring the economy, the environment, and society into sustainable relations. In particular, we find that the narrow focus of too many academics, policy-makers, and business executives upon the use of market forces and/or government regulations to promote sustainable development concedes too much to private interests. With Speth (2008), we agree that the problems of sustainability today are the result of “systemic failures” that call for “transformative change in the key features of this contemporary capitalism” (p. 9). While the two of us make our living as professors of business management and thus are bound to the idea of private interests in the marketplace, the two of us also are committed Christians and thus are also bound to the idea that private conduct must be informed by the truths of faith. Taking these two ideas together we believe that a true idea of sustainability cannot be conceived or achieved by economic or governmental policy reasoning alone. We believe that what is needed is economic reasoning inspired and informed by faith (Tucker & Grim, 2007). In particular, we believe that what is needed is a theological concept of sustainability that

puts human development in the service of God, that highest authority that intends not just private goods but the good of all creation. Absent faith in God, the private interests that put the economy at odds with society and the environment cannot be expected to bring them into right relation. This, after all, is the abiding lesson of the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1968): that self-interest alone is not self-correcting. We believe that applied theological ethics can bring an important and necessary perspective to this issue.

Sustainability in Today’s World

Everywhere there are indications of unhappiness and 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). While there is no shortage of well-meaning advocates determined to make a difference, their efforts mostly tinker at the edges of a market system that is itself flawed. Let’s take a look at how these pieces 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.

Inadequate Solutions

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).

Putting such goals into practice remains a challenge. Many regard the Brundtland Commission definition as an aspiration rather than a guide to 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 (1998) 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).

Such calls for sustainable development by 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 idea doesn't 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 (e.g., increased transparency and increased accountability in markets and in environmental policy, greater use of intelligent subsidies and market-based approaches to change, elimination of perverse incentives, technologies that facilitate better environmental relations) they believe that such remedies are necessarily limited in scope and impact. In a word, they see such ideas as attempts to use the flawed tools of a flawed system to fix it. They remind us that simple adherence to metrics such as internal rate of return or net present value is a large part of what got us into the mess we're in. Simple metrics, they argue, obscure broader responsibilities 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

True sustainability challenges our most basic thinking about economy, society, and environment. It tests widely-held assumptions such as that economic growth is necessary; that nature is a limitless source for materials and sink for wastes; that technology can manage natural systems; or that profit is the best objective for business (Capra 1982; Daly & Cobb 1994; Daly 1991; Gladwin, Kennelly & Krause 1995). At the same time it questions the morality of basic business practices such as discounting the future (Stern Report 2007), the free movement of capital flows (Soros 1998), and the distribution of patent rights (e.g., to life-saving drugs).

Above all, true 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. Within the halls of academe today there are questions about basic economic logic (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 (see Friedman 1970)? Such logic dismisses calls for attention to environmental and social issues within market environments (see e.g., Meckling & Jensen 1983) and in so doing disdains calls for 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" (p. 38). 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 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 there is only the logic of the market to solve problems of human meaning and value, problems that betoken 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).

Sustainability in Full

As noted above, we come to the question of sustainability not only as professors of business, but also as Christians. We believe that this latter and far greater part of our being begins to answer many of the challenges outlined above that sustainability poses to thinking about economic development and promises a deeper and fuller understanding of what sustainability means. In what follows we sketch as best we can what a Christian idea of sustainable business might look like. We do so, not as experts in theology, but as professors of business management interested in integrating the lessons of economic reason with the truths of our faith.

The immediate and most important lesson we draw from our Christian faith is that the idea of sustainability is beyond the reach of the secular mind focused on the natural world described by business economics. To the contrary, the idea belongs to the moral world of creation described by divine revelation. Its concerns are distinctively human: 1) of the human person made in God's image, and 2) of 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. Economic calls to sustainability fail because they do not speak to that part of our being that is fully human, to that part of us beyond nature, to that part of us that hungers for meaning, and for the transcendent absolute. Thus, against the secularism of our profession of

business management, we turn 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 find a voice for sustainability in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. From it we glean four theological principles.

First, sustainability is an *anthropic principle* brought into focus by our human person created by God in His image. According to Revelation, God gave us a creative will for the care and custody of His creation. In Genesis (1:28) God blessed Adam and Eve 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.” That blessing is ours for all time.

Second, sustainability is a *relational principle* that concerns how we relate to our self, to others, and to the world around us. The God who made all things sustains all things, including these relationships that comprise our being. This is seen in the three diagrams of Figure 1 which 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.

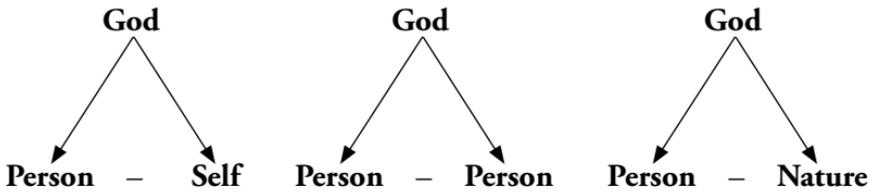


Figure 1. Sustainability in relation

According to Church teaching, we come into full and sustainable human being *in, with, and through* God. As 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 in transcendent relation with God. Against this sustaining relation is the “impersonal market” imagined in economics in which we exploit others for selfish gain and in which we join others in nothing more than a coincidence of

interests. And last, we come into being with nature as she and we join in 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 (p. 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 Hoffman & Sandelands 2005; Sandelands 2005).

The principle of relation suggests a third *ethical principle*. 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 God relinquishes to us in freedom (Guardini 1998). Thus, the good of sustainability is for us to choose. It is for us to live in the sustainable relations described above, that God has defined for us, in which God is at the center of our being. In general this is a struggle against evil for the good. In particular this is 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 it 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 of God's love for all of creation and for all of God's 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 the human person in his image. 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 God's 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 here and now. The highest reach of sustainability is God in whom we are reconciled to ourselves, to other persons, and to all of nature. God's love—which is love itself—is our hope for fruitful and lasting relations of economy, society, and the environment.

Sustainability in Practice

The Catholic Church articulates a social doctrine in which we can discern a practical idea of sustainable economic development. Consisting of eight principles described in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC)* (2004), this doctrine supports our destiny in God—a destiny which, as we have seen, is the 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 that the collection be appreciated in its “unity, interrelatedness, and articulation” (CSDC 2004, p. 71). This recognizes that our being in God is unitary and encourages us to protect it 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 into 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 the 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 constrained by the no less absolute right that God's gifts 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 human dignity. Destroying the environment or selfishly hoarding the majority of goods of this earth for a small minority is contrary to this dignity.

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 and not as ends unto themselves—thus to equate the value of person with what they produce rather than with who they are. And a third is a distorted environmentalism that either puts human ambitions ahead of nature's needs or that reverses this priority to put nature's demands ahead of human 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 our 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 development. However, as Nobel economist Kenneth Arrow (1994) explains, modern economic theory rests upon an idea of “the market” that 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 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. Although 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 idea of sustainability in 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. 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.

In the pages of this article we acknowledge the moral and spiritual basis of sustainability that lies beyond economic and political reasoning and solutions. In this we join 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.” We believe that such change can be accomplished only by engaging religious and spiritual thought. Indeed “no other group of institutions can wield the particular moral authority of the religions” (Tucker 2003: 9) and no other institutions are able to stand up to the powerful institutions of economics and policy. Without faith, we doubt that solutions to the sustainability challenge can be found.

In that spirit, we have argued for a bigger idea of sustainability that includes the transcendent relationship at the very core of our being; namely our being in God. We found a blueprint for sustainability in the social doctrine of the Church, and particularly in its principles of unity, good, universal destination, subsidiarity, participation, solidarity, social values,

and love. Bearing these principles in mind and seeking their best application will help ensure a sustainable future. Drawing from the theology and social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, we imagine and hope that public discussion about sustainability can be transformed, from a gloomy contentiousness based on a politics of fear, to a bright cooperation based on a politics of hope.

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