



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Economic Sustainability?

by Maurice Lange, OMI

What would we have done differently?

During this time of economic crisis, corporations, families and religious communities are having to reduce their spending and trim their budgets. Many workplaces are being downsized. Attending to the bottom line is at the forefront of our collective awareness. All this effort is towards achieving a sense of *economic* sustainability.

In the midst of these signs of the times, I ponder: what would we have done differently, say, three years ago, if we knew this economic crisis was coming? Would we have spent and consumed as we did?

What would we have done differently?

Perhaps the question may strike us as too challenging. Most of us didn't know about the coming economic crisis, and therefore that lack of knowledge seemingly absolves us of any moral queasiness in terms of our lifestyle choices and spending decisions in the recent past. Nevertheless, I believe it is worth the effort to try and hypothesize some responses as to different courses of action we might have taken a few years ago.

I say this, because as we are now suddenly extremely concerned about economic "sustainability"—I'm afraid that our lens is once again too narrow and our perspective dangerously short-sighted.

Perhaps we didn't know sometime back that an economic crisis was coming, but we do know now that **there is currently an ecological crisis** and this crisis will continue to come. I can imagine us a few years from now being sad-

dened by our current complacency and mourning the lost opportunities. Had we broadened our perceptions and heeded the more comprehensive signs of the times, we certainly would have acted out a deepened sense of relationship with Earth.

As we are currently shocked into action to make sudden efforts towards economic sustainability, can we find it within ourselves to ponder a vision that will work towards ecological sustainability?



Both "economy" and "ecology" come from the same root work "eco" meaning "of the household". A healthy and sustainable economy cannot be derived from dysfunctional, unsustainable human actions upon the ecology.

Sallie McFague, in her recent book "A New Climate for Theology", distinguishes between two different views of economy and its relationship with ecology. These are "*neoclassical economics*" and "*ecological economics*". The former "rests on assumptions from the eighteenth century view of human beings as individuals with rights and responsibilities, and of the world as a machine or a collection of individual parts, related externally to one another." The latter "rests on assumptions from postmodern science in its view of human beings as the conscious and radically dependent parts of the planet, and of the world as a community or an organism, internally related in all its parts."

How might we act differently if our economic lens was ecological? For our human community to be holistically sustainable, our current neoclassical lens needs a sharp corrective.

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Letter from the Director



Summertime greetings from your friends at *La Vista*! The long days of Summer bring their warmth and fruitfulness and certainly a unique feel. Like other seasons Summer conjures up special memories... I equate Summer with swimming, family vacations and time outside of time. What blessings of Summer do you recall; which blessings of the season will you be enjoying these months?

In this Summer Solstice edition of *La Vista Visions* we attempt to broaden the focus of much of the current and well-intentioned efforts at achieving economic sustainability. We believe that an ecological lens must be utilized for any human effort to truly be sustainable.

Here in Godfrey, our agricultural project, the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista*, continues to envision through an ecological lens. The effect that this effort has had upon the soil, bird population, air and water quality, as well as the human society and economy, has been life-giving and sustaining. Growing food in a sustainable fashion, building a human community around this source of nourishment, providing a just recompense for our farmer and apprentices, sharing our harvest with those economically disadvantaged (over 9 tons in 6 seasons), being a model for 6 other similar projects—all point to what can be accomplished when tending to that which is ultimately vital and broader than only the “bottom line”. Nearly 200 families are enjoying the bountiful harvest in this our 7th season.

Here at the *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* our ongoing efforts are towards evoking a mutually-enhancing and sustaining relationship between humans and Earth. Our invitation is “Come broaden your vision at *La Vista*!” We look forward to this Summer’s celebration of the Solstice on June 21st as well as the annual Earth Literacy program “Ex-

Summer Solstice, 2009

ploring the Sacred Universe” being held August 3-10. A real growth of interest in volunteering along with our weekly discussion series such as “Voluntary Simplicity” point to an awakening consciousness on the part of many. These folks are coming to see that an ecological lens as a requirement regarding their perspective, spirituality and lifestyle. This real and life-giving awakening, and the need for places like the Oblate Ecological Initiative, will only grow into the future.

This Summer brings about a change for me personally. Through long, rich and often difficult discernment I have come to see that I am being called by God to a leave of absence. The Oblates in this country have never been more supportive of our worldwide priority of the Integrity of Creation and of this particular ecological ministry than they have been in recent years. For that widespread encouragement and the vision of our Oblate leadership eight years ago calling us to begin the Ecological Initiative, I am most grateful. Gratefulness too is extended to all the other folks, including you readers, for helping to continue to build this part of the Great Work. I feel very good as to where this Ecological Project and Ministry currently is and is going: with Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND and MaryJo Jacobs here in the Learning Center and Farmer Kris Larson, farm apprentices and the Garden’s Core Group continuing their dedication as always—I am confident of a viable and sustaining future for the Oblate Ecological Initiative. To where God ultimately takes me during this leave of absence I can only be open. Let us all be attuned to the Spirit and work toward a truly sustainable future wherever we are found. ☯

In deep gratitude,

-Maurice Lange, OMI



Maurice and Lorenzo (RIP). See page 6.

(continued from page 1)

What could serve as a broadened definition of sustainability?

For humans to live sustainably, the Earth's resources must be used at a rate at which they can be replenished. However, there is now clear scientific evidence that humanity is living unsustainably, and that an unprecedented collective effort is needed to return human use of natural resources to within sustainable limits.¹

Since the 1980s, the idea of human sustainability has become increasingly associated with the integration of economic, social and environmental spheres. In 1989, the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) articulated what has now become a widely accepted definition of sustainability: **"[to meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."**²

So, before religious communities sell off their landholdings, before corporations lay off further thousands, before we all line-up outside the doors at Wal-Marts... and possibly thus achieve some sense of short-term economic "sustainability"—can we look to generations hence, hear *that* cry of the poor, and respond with simpler, more truly sustainable lifestyles now?

This call for a broadening of perception regarding sustainability might be somewhat illustrated by a fable from

Aesop:

Once upon a time...in a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest.

"Why not come and chat with me," said the Grasshopper, "instead of toiling and moiling in that way?"

"I am helping to lay up food for the winter," said the Ant, "and recommend you to do the same."

"Why bother about winter?" said the Grasshopper; we have got plenty of food at present." But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer.

*Then the Grasshopper knew: It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.*³ ☯

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>

² *ibid*

³ http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops_Fables/The_Ant_and_the_Grasshopper_p1.html

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human / Earth Relationship



A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming

by Sallie McFague

In her newest book, McFague maintains that global warming occurs because we lack an appropriate understanding of ourselves as inextricably bound to the planet and its systems. She paints an alternative idea of what being human means and what a just and sustainable economy might mean in an unfolding universe of divine love and human freedom.

Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy

by Geoff Garver and Peter Brown

Using the core Quaker principle of "right relationship"—respecting the integrity, resilience, and beauty of human and natural communities—as the foundation for a new economic model, the authors propose new answers to basic questions that combine an acute awareness of ecological limits with a fundamental focus on fairness and a concern with the spiritual, as well as material, well-being of the human race.



Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth by David Korten

Korten, in an inspiring as well as lucid way, outlines an agenda to bring into being a new economy—locally based, community oriented, and devoted to creating a better life for all, not simply increasing profits for the few.

Saving Earth - Saving Community

By Christina Cobourn Herman

As I read and talk to people about the climate crisis I am alternately inspired and alarmed. Inspired by the emerging spirituality underpinning a new vision for how humans can live on the earth, and by the practical efforts of thousands to create truly sustainable communities in our industrialized world. Alarmed by the impending ecological devastation from continued, unrestrained use of carbon-intensive fossil fuels.

The crisis is not an exaggeration. Up to 30 percent of species will face increasing risks of extinction if temperatures rise by another 1 degree Celsius. Glaciers supplying water to South Asia and the Andes are melting rapidly, threatening the water supplies of millions of people, animals and plants. Rising sea levels and expected storm surges threaten coastal communities and low-lying island nations with inundation. Some Pacific islands are already being de-populated as the sea level rises. Droughts due to altered rainfall patterns would spell disaster for the rain fed agriculture on which much of Africa depends for survival. Violent weather will be costly both to the physical infrastructure we have constructed and the agriculture that feeds all. Added to this will be an expansion of tropical diseases as mosquitoes and other disease-bearing insects move north with warmer weather.

All of these problems are directly connected to how we live on the earth and they pose strong reasons for why we need to move quickly to a low-carbon economy. In any case, oil is a finite resource, and, according to industry analysts, if oil production hasn't already peaked, it will in the next decade. We will still have oil; it will just be dirtier and more expensive to get out of the ground. Witness the oil sands of Alberta, extraction of which is destroying wide swaths of the boreal forest and over-exploiting the great Athabasca River. Oil sands production is itself carbon intensive and leaves behind damaged ecosystems as well as vast toxic waste ponds. This, in my mind, is far from sustainable – it borders on madness.

Even if we could find a carbon-free substitute for oil, and hydrogen is a good possibility, transitioning will take time – time that we no longer have. More fundamentally, we are simply consuming too much. At present, we are using two and a half planets worth of resources. So, clearly, we can't continue with business as usual.


Annie Leonard's wonderful stick-figure film - *The Story of Stuff* - has been viewed by six million people at its site, storyofstuff.com, and millions more have seen it on YouTube and in classrooms. If you haven't seen it, you should. The film captures in a clear engaging manner, the relationship we sense between our too-busy lives, the absurd amount of stuff we have, the ecological decay we can glimpse (most of it is off-shore), and our frustrated desire for meaning and connection.

People are starting to act, in small ways and big. Diversity, a key principle in nature, is a guiding principle in the sustainability movement. People are beginning to re-imagine their communities based on local needs and realities. There will not and should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. But, there are a few basic ideas that sustainable communities will likely share.

One of these is organically, locally grown food. It is a lynchpin of a sustainable economic system. We need to be able to feed ourselves in ways that do not require carbon-based inputs and that are healthy. Local currency schemes also will probably play an important role – local currencies keep money in the local economy while facilitating the exchange of goods and services. They have the added benefit of being resistant to global economic woes. The buildings we live and work in need to be made more energy efficient but we also need to re-think how we work. Matthew Bauer, a visionary CEO of BetterWorld, a green telecom company, puts it this way: "We have too many buildings and we move around too much. This needs to change."

The principle of subsidiarity will be an important organizing principle. This means that decisions should be made at the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority – a great stimulus for real democracy. Finally, entertaining ourselves and taking time to explore meaning in our lives – personally and collectively – will reinvigorate our stressed, over-burdened lives.

The Transition Town Movement is one approach to re-fashioning our communities to be more resilient and sustainable that is spreading around the world quite quickly. This is a process that communities can engage in now to re-structure local systems – from transportation to food supply. It is designed to enable communities to cope with the threats raised by peak oil while at the same time transitioning to more ecologically sound ways of living.

The re-structuring of our communities to be ecologically sustainable is both essential and urgent. Fortunately, the sustainability movement in all of its variety has the potential for re-invigorating our democracy as well as our planet. 

Resources:

Transition Town Movement: There are Transition groups in many US states. See the Wikipedia entry for links: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transition_Towns

Local Future is a group that looks interesting <http://localfuture.org/index.htm>

Christina Herman is the Associate Director of the Oblate Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office in Washington, DC. She works on human rights and economic justice issues, and engages in corporate dialogues on water, access to medicines, CO₂ emissions reductions, and oil sands. Christina is married and a mother of two school-age children.





Folks find deep meaning here at *La Vista*



Oblates enjoying the fruits of the garden



Planting during the Spring Equinox Celebration

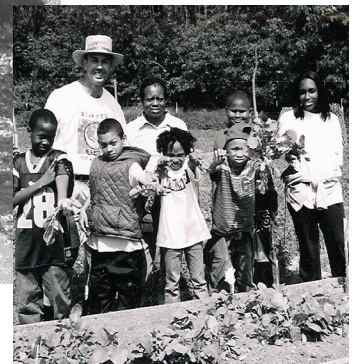


Turning the sun staff at the Autumn Equinox



Sustaining the land at *La Vista*...

Inner city children experience the fruits of the soil.



Farmer Kris caring for the garden



Earth Literacy participants embrace the land



Earth Day 2009 Environmental Art



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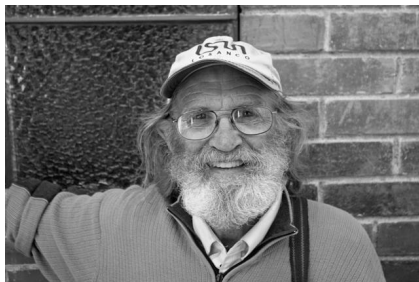
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Visit us at www.lavistaELC.org & www.lavistaCSA.org

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The Oblate Ecological Initiative remembers
Father Lorenzo Rosebaugh, OMI
May 16, 1935 - May 18, 2009

Father Lorenzo (Larry) Rosebaugh, OMI, was a great encouragement to the Oblate Ecological Initiative. Lorenzo wrote his memoirs while residing here at *La Vista* earlier this decade.

Lorenzo, a man committed to non-violence, justice and peace, was killed in Guatemala - a victim of violence and aggression. One who lived with the poor, his violent death was the ultimate identification with those in poverty - as so many humble people of Latin America and other places die because of injustice and brutality.

Lorenzo's ministry was on the fringe. People gravitated to him because of his disarming smile and gentle demeanor. He lived the Oblate charism of prayerfulness and being with the most abandoned in Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, and Guatemala. In this country Lorenzo protested nuclear weapons and wars from Vietnam to Iraq. In 1982 he was alongside Fr. Roy Bourgeois at Fort Benning, Georgia, calling the Latin American soldiers being trained there to heed Bishop Oscar Romero's plea for peace.

Lorenzo was so excited about the Great Work being done by the Oblates and other communities in the realm of eco-spirituality and sustainable agriculture. His witness, zest and companioning will be greatly missed. His gentle spirit remains in all of our fond memories. *Lorenzo! Presente!*

(We thought that our readers would be interested in reading a great article Lorenzo penned for *La Vista Visions* describing his ecological vocation. Go to our website www.lavistaelc.org and follow the link. His very moving autobiography, **To Wisdom Through Failure: A Journey of Compassion, Resistance and Hope**, can be purchased through Epica Publishing.)

