

Chapter 6

**GOD'S HOUSEHOLD: CHRISTIANITY,
ECONOMICS, AND PLANETARY LIVING**

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ABSTRACT

Religions help us form the basic assumptions about who we are and how we should act in the world. Presently, two worldviews with accompanying economic rules for planetary living vie for our loyalty. One is the neoclassical market model with its ideology of greed and its goal of growth: the consumer society. The other is the ecological economic model with its creed of interdependence and its goal of planetary sustainability: the just society. Many Christians, particularly middle-class North Americans, are presently captive to the first model. Christianity should, however, advocate the second model—the one that sees the good of all beings, including human beings, as dependent on a sustainable planet where resources are justly distributed. The ecological economic model is not Christian economics; rather, it is an economic model that faintly resembles the radical inclusiveness and open table of Jesus' Kingdom of God. It is better than the market model for human beings and the planet. It is also a more appropriate one for Christians to support.

RELIGION AND ECONOMICS

None of the world's major religions has as its maxim: "Blessed are the greedy." Given the many differences among religions on doctrines and practice, it is remarkable to find widespread agreement at the level of economics. Often, however, religion is not considered to be *about* economics; in fact, many in most societies do not want religion to intrude into economics. It is preferable, they say, for religion to attend to "religious matters" and leave economics to the economists.

But most religions know better. They know that economics is about human well-being, about who eats and who does not, who has clothes and shelter and who does not, who has the basics for a decent life and who does not. Economics is about life and death, as well as the quality of life. Economics is not just about money, but about sharing scarce resources among all who need them.

Economics is a justice issue, so why would religions not be concerned with it?

In many religions the concern for justice has been focused on human beings—and this is certainly the case in Christianity, at least for the last few centuries. But recently, the issues of well-being and justice have been extended to embrace the entire planet. The well-being of the planet and of its people is increasingly seen to be inextricably related. In Christianity, there is a return to the cosmological context for interpreting the faith rather than the narrow psychological focus prevalent since the Reformation. In fact, many current Christian theologians embrace all three of the classical interpretive contexts: the cosmological, the political, and the personal (Hendry 1980, chapter 1). That is, Christian faith embraces the *world*—all of creation and not just human beings who make up less than one percent of it. The Redeemer is also the Creator: all of creation, including dying nature as well as oppressed people, are within God's "economy," God's "household."

It is no coincidence that the Greek word for house, *oikos*, is the source of our words for economics, ecology, and ecumenical. The three belong together: in order for the whole household of the planet to flourish, the earth's resources must be distributed justly among all its inhabitants; human and earth others, on a sustainable basis. The three basic economic rules for all to thrive in this household are: take only your share; clean up after yourself; and keep the house in good repair for those to come. These rules should be pinned up on the planet's "fridge" for all members to memorize and follow. They are necessities, not suggestions, that constitute the basic economic laws for long-term planetary well-being.

But this economic paradigm is certainly not the dominant one in global society today. Nor is it the one that most Christians seem to be embracing. To be sure, Christians do not openly support "Blessed are the greedy." Nonetheless, that is the way most of us live. Why? Quite simply, because we are members of a society, now a worldwide one, that accepts, almost without question, an economic theory that supports insatiable greed on the part of individuals. This theory lies behind present-day market capitalism

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and, since the death of communism and the decline of socialism, it is accepted by most ordinary people as a description of the way things are and must be. Market capitalism is seen as the "truth." Although it is a "description of the way things are" in our society, it is not a description of the way things must be—or should be. Market capitalism is a type of economics that allocates scarce resources on the basis of individuals successfully competing for them, not with regard to the needs of the planet's inhabitants nor with an eye to its sustainability. It is an economic model which makes a case for how scarce resources might be allocated, not a description of how they must be allocated.

This realization—that economics is not a "hard" science, but an ideology with an assumed anthropology and goal for the planet (summarized by greed and growth)—is the first step in seeing things otherwise. Ecological economics—economics for the well-being of the whole household of planet Earth and all its creatures—is also a model with an anthropological and planetary ideology. This model claims that human beings, while greedily to be sure, are even more needy. After all, they, we, depend on the health of all the other parts of the planet for our very existence: clean water, breathable air, arable land, plants, etc. Ecological economics claims that market capitalism denies one huge fact: unless the limited resources of the planet are justly distributed among its myriad life forms so they all can flourish, there will be no sustainable future for even the greediest among us. We cannot live without these other sources of our existence; we can live only a few minutes without air, a few days without water, a few weeks without food. Of all creatures alive, we are the neediest.

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Is ecological economics "Christian" economics? No, not in any one-on-one or exclusive sense. It is, however, an emerging economic model that is being increasingly set forth and supported by a wide range of NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) and protest movements. As reported recently in the press, the motto of ecological economics is "a different world is possible," and its basic tenets are concern for fair labor laws and environmental

health. Lynn White's oft-quoted essay lays the blame for environmental deterioration at the feet of religion, specifically Christianity (White 1967, 1203-7). If Christianity was capable of doing such immense damage, then surely the restoration of nature must also lie, at least in part, with Christianity. I believe it does, but also with other world religions as well as with education, government, economics, and science. The environmental crisis creates a "planetary agenda," involving all people, all areas of expertise, all religions.

This is the case because the environmental crisis is not a "problem" that any specialization can solve. Rather it is about how we—all of us human beings and all other creatures—can live justly and sustainably on our planet. It is about the "house rules" that will enable us to do so. These rules include attitudes as well as technologies, behaviors as well as science. They are what the *oikos*, the house we all share, demands that we think and do so there will be enough for everyone. The "house rules" are concerned with the management of the resources of planet Earth so that all may thrive indefinitely.

How does religion and specifically Christianity fit into this picture? It fits where all religions do: at the point of the worldview underlying the house rules. It fits at the level of the deeply held and often largely unconscious assumptions about who we are in the scheme of things and how we should act.¹ While anthropology is not the only concern of religions, it is a central one and, for the purposes of the ecological crisis, the one that may count the most.

This chapter will attempt to make the case that Christianity, at least since the Protestant Reformation and especially since the Enlightenment, has through its individualistic view of human life,

¹ Marcus J. Borg describes this well: "A root image is a fundamental 'picture' of reality. Perhaps most often called a 'world-view,' it consists of our most taken-for-granted assumptions about what is possible. . . . Very importantly, a root image not only provides a model of reality, but also shapes our perception and our thinking, operating almost unconsciously within us as a dim background affecting all of our seeing and thinking. A root image thus functions as both an image and a lens: it is a picture of reality which becomes a lens through which we see reality." Borg 1994, 127.

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implicitly and sometimes explicitly, supported the neoclassical economic paradigm. This paradigm has led to the current consumer culture, which is devastating the planet and widening the gap between the rich and the poor.² As an alternative, we will suggest that Christianity, given its oldest and deepest anthropology, should support an ecological economic model, one in which our well-being is seen as interrelated and interdependent with the well-being of all other living things and earth processes.³ At the moment, Christianity is not advocating such a model. Indeed, it is the claim of this chapter that the individualistic anthropology that is deep within our consumer-oriented culture is supported not only by government and contemporary economics but also by religion.⁴ When these three major institutions present a united front, a sacred canopy is cast over a society, validating the behavior of its people. It is difficult to believe that science and technology alone can solve an ecological crisis supported by this triumvirate which legitimizes human beings continuing to feel, think, and act in ways that are contrary to the just distribution of the world's resources and the sustainability of the planet.

² The literature on the neoclassical economic model and its alternative—what I am calling the ecological economic model—is large and growing. Some of the works I found most helpful are as follows: Brown et al.; Costanza et al. 1997; Crocker and Linden 1998; Daly and Cobb 1994; Daly 1996; Goodwin, Ackerman, and Kirton 1997; Hackett 1998; Rasmussen 1996; Rieger 1998; *United Nations Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press), issued annually; Zweig 1991.

³ By the oldest and deepest anthropology, I am referring to what George Hendry calls the "cosmological" and "political" understandings of God and the world rather than the more recent and narrow "psychological" view. The latter, which supports individualism, has arisen in the last several hundred years, but the other two, one emphasizing the whole creation and the other the community of all human beings, are grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the New Testament and early theology (especially Irenaeus and Augustine). See Hendry 1980.

⁴ The evidence supporting this claim would take considerable space to lay out. Suffice it to say here that both the born-again and New Age versions of popular religion do so: the American Declaration of Independence's "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" does, and Adam Smith's description of the human being as a creature of insatiable greed makes a significant contribution. All focus on the rights, desires, and needs of individuals.

ities" by neoclassical economics (Daly 1996, 50ff.). In other words, the issues of who benefits from an economic system and whether the planet can bear the system's burden are not part of neoclassical economics.

In sum, the worldview or basic assumption of neoclassical economics is surprisingly simple and straightforward: human beings are self-interested individuals who, acting on this basis, will create a syndicate or corporation, even a global one, capable of benefiting all eventually. Hence, as long as the economy grows, individuals in a society will sooner or later participate in prosperity. These assumptions about human nature are scarcely value-neutral. They indicate a preference for a certain view of who we are and what the goal of human effort should be: the view of human nature is individualism and the goal is economic growth.

When we turn to the alternative ecological economic paradigm we see a different set of values. Are we basically greedy or needy? Probably both, but as our answers veer toward one pole or the other, we will find ourselves embracing an individualistic or a community model of life. Ecological economics claims we cannot survive (even to be greedy) unless we acknowledge our profound dependence on one another and the earth. Human need is more basic than human greed: we are relational beings from the moment of our conception to our last breath. The well-being of the individual is inextricably connected to the well-being of the whole.

These two interpretations of who we are and where we fit in the world are almost mirror opposites of each other on the three critical issues of allocation of resources, distributive justice, and sustainability. Neoclassical economics begins with the unconstrained allocation of resources to competing individuals, on the assumption that if all people operate from this base, issues of fair distribution and sustainability will eventually work themselves out. Ecological economics begins with the viability of the whole community, on the assumption that only as it thrives now and in the future will its various members, including human beings, thrive as well. In other words, ecological economics begins with sustainability and distributive justice, not with the allocation of resources among competing individuals. Before all else the com-

munity must be able to survive (sustainability), which it can do only if all members have the use of resources (distributive justice). Then, within these parameters, the allocation of scarce resources among competing users can take place.

Ecological economics does not pretend to be value-free; its preference is evident: the well-being and sustainability of our household, planet Earth. It recognizes the *oikos* base of ecology, economics, and eumencicity: economics is the management of a community's physical necessities for the benefit of all. Ecological economics is a human enterprise that seeks to maximize the optimal functioning of the planet's gifts and services for all users. Ecological economics, then, is first of all a vision of how human beings ought to live on planet Earth in light of the perceived reality of where and how we live. We live in, with, and from the earth. This story of who we are is based on postmodern science, not as in neoclassical economics, on the eighteenth-century story of reality.

NEOCLASSICAL OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS:

WHICH IS GOOD FOR PLANET EARTH?

In addressing this question, we are concerning ourselves with the most important of the three economic issues: sustainability. Can neoclassical economics as currently understood sustain the planet? In the neoclassical economic view the world is a machine or syndicate; presumably then, when some parts give out they can be replaced with substitutes. If, for instance, our main ecological problem is nonrenewable resources (oil, coal, minerals, etc.), then human ingenuity might well fill in the gaps when they occur. Since the earth is considered an externality by many neoclassical economics, then "good for the planet" can only mean good for human beings to use. Sustainability is not the major priority.

The state of our planet at the beginning of the new millennium, however, is far different than simply the loss of nonrenewable resources. In fact, that problem is of less importance than two other related ones: the rate of loss of renewable resources and the manner in which these losses overlap and support further deterioration. The big problems are the loss of water, trees, fertile soil,

NEOCLASSICAL AND ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS

The two worldviews—neoclassical economic(s) and ecological economic(s)—are dramatically different; consequently, they have different anthropologies and different house rules. The first model sees human beings on the planet as a corporation or syndicate, a collection of individuals drawn together to benefit its members by optimal use of natural resources. The second model sees the planet more like an organism or a community that survives and prospers through the interdependence of all its parts, human and non-human. The first model 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 collection of individual parts, related externally to one another. The second model rests on assumptions from postmodern science in its view of human beings as the conscious and radically dependent part of the planet and of the world as a community or organism, internally related in all its parts. Both are models, interpretations of the world and our place in it: neither is a description of fact. This point must be underscored because the first model seems natural, indeed inevitable and true to most middle-class Westerners, while the second model seems novel, perhaps even utopian or fanciful. In fact, both come from assumptions of different historical periods; both are world-pictures built on these assumptions, and each vies for our agreement and loyalty.

We will suggest that the syndicate or machine model is injurious to nature and to poor people, while the other one, the community or organic model, is healthier for the planet and all its inhabitants. In other words, we need to assess the “economy” of both models, their notions of the allocation of scarce resources to family members, to determine which view of the “good life” is better.

The mention of allocation of scarce resources brings us to the heart of the matter. The reason economics is so important, why it is a religious and ecological issue, is that it is not just a matter of money; rather, it is a matter of survival and flourishing. Econom-

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ics is a value issue. In making economic decisions, the “bottom line” is not the only consideration. Many other values are present in decisions concerning scarce resources: from the health of a community to its recreational opportunities; from the beauty of other life forms to our concern for their well-being; from a desire to see our children fed and clothed to a sense of responsibility for the welfare of future generations.

Contemporary neoclassical economists, however, generally deny that economics is about values.⁵ But this denial is questionable. By neoclassical economics we mean market capitalism as conceived by Adam Smith in the eighteenth century and, more particularly, the version of it practiced by the major economies of our time. The key feature of market capitalism is the allocation of scarce resources by means of decentralized markets: allocation occurs as the result of individual market transactions each of which is guided by self-interest (Hackett 1998, 33). At the base of neoclassical economics is an anthropology: human beings are individuals motivated by self-interest. The value by which scarce resources are allocated, then, is the fulfillment of the self-interest of human beings. The assumption is that each person will act to maximize her or his own interest, and by doing so all will eventually benefit from the so-called invisible hand of classical economic theory.

Neoclassical economics has one value: the monetary fulfillment of individuals provided they compete successfully for the resources. But what of other values? Two key ones, if we have the economics of the entire planet in mind, are the just distribution of the earth's resources and the ability of the planet to sustain our use of its resources. However, these matters—distributive justice to the world's inhabitants and the optimal scale of the human economy within the planet's economy—are considered “external-

⁵ Milton Friedman's distinction between “positive” and “normative” economics is typical: “Normative economics is speculative and personal, a matter of values and preferences that are beyond science. Economics as a science, as a tool for understanding and prediction, must be based solely on positive economics which ‘is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgments.’” See Friedman 1953, 4.

clean air, fisheries, and biodiversity, *and* the ways the degradation of each of these renewables contributes to the deterioration of the rest. In other words, if the planet is seen more like an organism than a machine, with all parts interrelated and interdependent, then after a certain level of decay of its various members, it will, like any body, become sick at its core, sick to the point of not functioning properly. It will not be able to sustain itself.

This is widely known as the "synergism of planetary operation." The various parts of the planet as an organism work together both in health and in decay to create something both better and worse than the individual parts. When the various members of an ecosystem are healthy, they work together to provide innumerable free services that none could do alone and that we take for granted: materials production (food, fisheries, timber, genetic resources, medicines), pollination, biological control of pests and diseases, habitat and refuge, water supply and regulation, waste recycling and pollution control, educational/scientific resources, recreation (Abramowitz 1997). These services are essential to our survival and well-being; they can continue only if we sustain them. This list of services should be seen as a web: none of them can function alone—each depends on the others. These services are part of the "commons" of our world community. They constitute our very lifeblood that we hold in trust for future generations.

The most important services are not necessarily the most visible ones. For instance, in a forest it is not only the standing trees that are valuable but also the fallen ones (the nurse logs on which new trees grow); the habitat the forest provides for birds and insects that pollinate crops and destroy diseases; the plants that provide biodiversity for food and medicines; the forest canopy that breaks the force of winds; the roots that reduce soil erosion; the photosynthesis of plants that helps stabilize the climate. The smallest providers—the insects, worms, spiders, fungi, algae, and bacteria—are critically important in creating a stable, sustainable home for humans and other creatures. If such a forest is clear-cut to harvest the trees, everything else goes as well. All these services disappear. A healthy ecosystem—complex and diverse in all its features, both large and small—is resilient like a well-functioning

body. A simplified, degraded nature, supporting single-species crops in ruined soil with inadequate water and violent weather events, results in a diminished environment for human beings as well. "The bottom line is that for humans to be healthy and resilient, nature must be too" (Abramowitz 1997, 109).

An economic model that does not have as its first priority the sustainability of the planet cannot be good for human beings. The neoclassical market model does not have such a priority. Hence, it is not good for us *even if we like it*. We are addicted to our consumer lifestyle, and we are in denial that it is bad for us and for our planet. But of even greater importance, it is *unjust*: many of the world's people have been impoverished by this model. As things now stand, some of us are consuming *much* more, while others are consuming less. According to the United Nations *Human Development Report* (1998), 20 percent of people in high-income countries account for 86 percent of private consumption while the poorest 20 percent of the world's population consume only 1.3 percent of the pie. In Africa, the average household consumes 20 percent less than it did 25 years ago. Furthermore, two-thirds of the world's population lives on less than two dollars per day.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL ECONOMIC MODEL

The model we need is very different. To recall, the ecological model claims that housemates must abide by three main rules: take only your share, clean up after yourselves, and keep the house in good repair for future occupants. We don't own this house; we don't even rent it. It is loaned to us for our lifetime with the proviso that we must obey the rules so that it can continue to feed, shelter, nurture, and delight others. These rules are not laws that we can circumvent or disobey; they are the conditions of our existence, and they are intrinsic to our happiness.

If we were to follow these rules we would be living within a different vision of the good life, the abundant life, than is current in our consumer culture and that is destroying the planet. We would begin to accept what ecological economist Robert Costanza calls our greatest calling: "Probably the most challenging task facing humanity today is the creation of a shared vision of a sustainable

and desirable society, one that can provide permanent prosperity within the biophysical constraints of the real world in a way that is fair and equitable to all of humanity, to other species, and to future generations" (Costanza et al. 1997, 179).

Which of the two worldviews expresses the values inherent in Christianity? Does it matter? Yes, it does if one accepts the assumption of this paper that worldviews matter. While there is no direct connection between believing and acting, thinking and doing, there is an implicit, deeper, and more insidious one: the worldview that persuades us that it is natural and inevitable becomes the secret partner of our decisions and actions.

Moreover, a persuasive case can be made that there is an intrinsic connection between the ecological economic model and Christianity. Distributive justice and sustainability, as goals for planetary living, are pale reflections, but reflections nonetheless, of what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God (Borg 1994). Let us look at the vivid portrait of Jesus by New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan: "The open commensality and radical egalitarianism of Jesus' Kingdom of God are more terrifying than anything we have ever imagined, and even if we can never accept it, we should not explain it away as something else" (Crossan 1994, 73-74). For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was epitomized by everyone being invited to the table; the Kingdom is known by radical equality at the level of bodily needs. Crossan names the Parable of the Feast as central to understanding what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God. This is a shocking story, trespassing society's boundaries of class, gender, status, and ethnicity—as its end result is inviting *all* to the feast. There are several versions (Matt. 22:1-13; Luke 14:15-24; Gospel of Thomas 64), but in each a prominent person invites other, presumably worthy, people to a banquet, only to have them refuse: one to survey a land purchase, another to try out some new oxen, a third to attend a wedding. The frustrated host then tells his servants to go out into the streets of the city and bring whomever they find to dinner: the poor, maimed, blind, lame, good, and bad (the list varies in the three versions). The shocking implication is that everyone—*anyone*—is invited. As Crossan remarks, if beggars come to your door, you

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might give them food or even invite them into the kitchen for a meal, but you don't ask them to join the family in the dining room or invite them back on Saturday night for supper with your friends. But that is exactly what happens in this story. The Kingdom of God, according to Crossan's portrait of Jesus, is "more terrifying than anything we have imagined" (Crossan 1994, 68) because it demolishes all our carefully constructed boundaries between the worthy and the unworthy and does so at the most physical, bodily level.

For first-century Jews, the key boundary was purity laws: one did not eat with the poor, women, the diseased, or the unrighteous. For us, the critical barrier is economic: one is not called to sustainable and just sharing of resources with the poor, the disadvantaged, the lazy. To do otherwise, in both cultures, is improper, not expected—in fact, shocking. And yet, in both cases, the issue is the most basic bodily one—who is invited to share the food? In other words: who lives and who dies? In both cases, the answer is the same: everyone, regardless of status (by any criteria), is invited. This vision of God's will for the world does not specifically mention just, sustainable planetary living, but throughout the Bible, Holy Scripture surely is more in line with that worldview than it is with the satisfaction of individual consumer desires.

Unlike our first-century Mediterranean counterparts, North American middle-class Christians are not terrified by the unclean, but we are by the poor. There are so many of them—billions! Surely we cannot be expected to share the planet's resources justly and sustainably with all of them. Yet, this historical Jesus appears to disagree: he is not, it seems, interested so much in religion, including his own, as in human well-being, beginning with the body: feeding the hungry and healing the suffering. Moreover, his message, according to Crossan, had less to do with what Jesus did for others than what others might do for their neighbors: "The Kingdom of God was not, for Jesus, a divine monopoly exclusively bound to his own person. It began at the level of the body and appeared as a shared community of healing and eating—that is to say, of spiritual and physical resources available to each and all without distinctions, discrimination, or hierarchies. One

entered the Kingdom as a way of life and anyone who could live it could bring it to others. It was not just words alone, or deeds alone, but both together as life-style" (Crossan 1994, 113-14).

The body is the locus: how we treat needy bodies gives the clue to how a society is organized. It suggests that correct "table manners" are a sign of a just society, the Kingdom of God. If one accepts this interpretation, the table becomes not primarily the priestly consecrated bread and wine of communion celebrating Jesus' death for the sins of the world, but rather the egalitarian meals of bread and fishes that one finds throughout Jesus' ministry (Crossan 1994, 79-81). At these events, all are invited to share in the food, whether it be meager or sumptuous. Were this understanding of the Eucharist to infiltrate Christian churches today, it could be mind-changing—in fact, maybe world-changing.

At the very least, such an understanding would be terrifying. Would it also be absurd, foolish, and utopian? Perhaps, but, as we have suggested, there appears to be a degree of continuity between this reconstruction of society—the Kingdom of God—and what we have described as the ecological economic worldview. This worldview is closer to that terrifying picture of sharing our food with the poor than is the neoclassical economic model. We might see this continuity as the ideal and the pale reflection of God's Kingdom; perhaps just, sustainable planetary living is a foretaste, a glimmer, an inkling of the Kingdom of God.

If this is the case, then for middle-class, North American Christians in so-called developed nations, it may well be that a primary form of sin is refusing to acknowledge the link between the Kingdom and the ecological economic worldview, explaining the obvious connection away because of the consequences for our privileged lifestyle. And yet we cannot ignore that sustainability and the just distribution of resources are concerned with human and planetary well-being for all. This is, we suggest, the responsible interpretation of the Parable of the Feast for affluent North American Christians living in the twenty-first century. It demands that we look at the systemic structures separating the haves and the have-nots in our time. They are the collective forms of our sin.

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They are the institutions, laws, and international bodies of market capitalism (often aided by the silence of the churches) that allow some to get richer and most to become poorer. Our sin is one of commission but perhaps more damningly of omission: our greed camouflaged by indifference and denial—and even by our good works of charity for the "uninvited."

NEXT STEPS: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

In order to dislodge the neoclassical economic worldview and Christianity's complicity with it, four steps are needed:

The first step is becoming conscious that neoclassical economics is a model, not a description, of how to allocate scarce resources. There are other ways to live, other ways to divide things up, other goals for human beings and the planet. "Economics" is always necessary, but not necessarily neoclassical economics: ecological economics is an alternative.

The second step is to suggest some visions of the good life that are not consumer dominated, visions that are just and sustainable. Such visions could include the basic necessities for all, universal medical care and education, opportunities for creativity and meaningful work, time for family and friends, green spaces in cities, and wilderness for other creatures. We need to ask what really makes people happy and which of these visions are just to the world's inhabitants and sustainable for the planet.

A third step is for well-off Christians to publicly advocate the ecological model as the more just and sustainable one for our planet. Specifically, this means becoming informed about the global injustices of market economics; joining with other NGOs to change the policies and practices of so-called free trade that result in impoverishment and unsustainability; and accepting the consequence for our own lifestyle that sharing earth's resources more justly and sustainably will entail. While no human economic system can be the Kingdom of God, Christians have the obligation to work for systems that are at least faint approximations, rather than in clear opposition, to it.

The fourth step is to rethink what the ecological economic

context would mean for the basic doctrines of Christianity: God and the world, Christ and salvation, human life and discipleship.

While this last task is beyond the scope of this paper, let us end with a few brief comments about God and the world, because this is at the heart of who we think we are and what we should do. Since our interpretive context, the ecological economic model, is about the just and sustainable allocation of resources among all planetary users, the framework for speaking of God and the world becomes worldly well-being. Or, to phrase it in terms of a gloss on Irenaeus: "The glory of God is every creature fully alive." Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it "worldly Christianity." He said that God is neither a metaphysical abstraction nor the answer to gaps in our knowledge—God is neither in the sky nor on the fringes but at "the center of the village," in the midst of life, both its pains and its joys (Bonhoeffer 1960, letter of April 30, 1944). An ecological economic model means an earthly God, an incarnate God, a truly immanent God.

As we look, then, at the big picture, the general outline of this theology, we find it basically different from the theology implied by the neoclassical model. Broadly speaking, the differences can be suggested as a movement toward the earth: from heaven to earth; from the otherworldly to this worldly; from above to below; from a distant, external God to a near, truly immanent God; from time and history to space and land; from soul to body; from individualism to community; from mechanistic to organic thinking; from spiritual salvation to holistic well-being; from anthropocentrism to cosmocentrism. The ecological model means a shift not from God to the world, but from a distant God related externally to the world to an embodied God who is the source of the world's life and fulfillment.

The neoclassical economic model assumes God, like the human being, is an individual; in fact, the super-individual who controls the world through laws of nature, much as a good mechanic makes a well-designed machine operate efficiently. This God is at the beginning (creation) and intervenes from time to time to influence personal and public history, but is otherwise absent from the world. The ecological model, on the contrary,

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claims that God is radically present in the world, as close as the breath, the joy, and the suffering of every creature. The two views of God and the world, then, are very different: in the one, God's power is evident in God's distant control of the world; in the other, God's glory is manifest in God's total self-giving to the world.

In closing, let us note that two pictures of God and the world suggest different answers to the question *Who are we and what should we do?* In the first, we are individuals responsible to a transcendent God who rewards or punishes according to our merits and God's mercy. In the second, we are beings-in-community living in the presence of God who is the power and love in everything that exists. In the first, we should do what is fair to other individuals while taking care of our own well-being; in the second, we should do what is necessary to work with God to create a just and sustainable planet, for only in that way will all flourish. This is the great work of the twenty-first century. Never before have we had to think of everyone and everything all together. We now know that if we are to survive and our planet flourish, we will do so as a whole or not at all. Christians believe we do not have to do this alone: "I came to you that you might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between economics as a "hard science" and economics as an "ideology"?
2. Describe and discuss the difference between "neoclassical economics" and "ecological economics."
3. Discuss the significance and feasibility of the "three house rules" for a sustainable economics and the flourishing of life on earth.
4. "... it may well be that a primary form of sin is refusing to acknowledge the link between [Jesus' view of] the Kingdom and the ecological economic worldview. . . ." Discuss the meaning of this statement and whether you agree.
5. Describe and discuss the different understandings of God that support the ecological and the neoclassical economic models.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Costanza, Robert, et al. *An Introduction to Ecological Economics*. Boca Raton, Fla.: St. Lucie Press, 1997.

Daly, Herman E. *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economics for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.