

ARTICLES

FEATURE: BUDDHISM AND ECONOMICS

A Buddhist-Christian Critique of Neo-Liberal Economics

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Introduction

I HAVE focused this discussion on neo-liberal economics because this is now the dominant form. It is dominant in universities in the United States, and it exercises a dominant influence on the institutions that support the global economy. This includes the government of the United States and the Bretton Woods Institutions—the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization.

I have described my critique as Buddhist-Christian. By this I do not mean anything esoteric. Although I am interested in differences between these two great religious traditions, I do not believe these differences are important for the critique of the dominant pattern of economic thinking. It is interesting that an early critic who wrote on “Buddhist Economics” was a conservative Catholic. I refer, of course, to Schumacher.

A critique of neo-liberal economics can emphasize either the theory or the practice. Both critiques are important, and a Buddhist or Christian perspective can inform either one. I have chosen to emphasize the theoretical one, although I will also indicate how theory works out in practice. What is wrong, from a Buddhist or Christian point of view, with the theory of neo-liberal economics?

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Before launching into such a critique, I want to note that a quite similar critique could be directed to many of the academic disciplines. Economics as a discipline is not worse than others from a Buddhist or Christian point of view. The difference is that it is the discipline that has succeeded most brilliantly. It has the ear of policy makers and corporate leaders, that is, of those who are in fact shaping the future of the world.

I. Academic Disciplines

Part of what is wrong with all the academic disciplines is that their shared understanding of the way knowledge should be pursued and organized is wrong from a Buddhist or Christian perspective. Too often it is supposed that any rigorous pursuit of specialized knowledge must take the form of one of these academic disciplines. This is not true, and the assumption that it is true has caused great harm. Let me explain.

The academic disciplines are children of the European Enlightenment. There is much to be said positively about the achievements of the Enlightenment and its children, the disciplines, but today I am attending chiefly to what is wrong. This draws attention to the worldview of the Enlightenment. Deliberately and consciously the Enlightenment thinkers reacted against the Medieval understanding of the world in which organic models played a primary role. They proposed that, instead, the machine be taken as the basic model. The clock was the machine most often in view.

There were two particularly important changes involved. The first was the rejection of teleology. Organisms behave purposefully, and Medieval thinkers, influenced by Aristotle, gave a great deal of attention to teleology. One could understand the behavior of an organism when one understood its purposes. One could understand any part of the universe when one understood the role it played in the whole. Early modern thinkers rightly saw that this preoccupation with teleology had misdirected much thought and research. To understand the world, they were convinced, one should focus on efficient causes.

Of course, clocks also serve purposes. But the purposes are not inherent in the clock. The behavior of the clock is to be explained in detail by the mechanical forces operating among its parts. The parts behave as they do, not because of their intrinsic nature or purposes, but because they are compelled to do so by pressures exerted on them by other parts.

Teleological questions are appropriate only if we ask why the clock exists at all. Here we appeal to human purposes. To understand the working of the

clock we attend only to efficient causes. Similarly, if we ask why the great world machine exists, we appeal to the purposes of God. If we ask how the world machine operates, we attend only to efficient causes.

A second feature of the machine in contrast to the organism is that it is essentially unchanged by a change in its environment. Organisms require particular types of environments in order to survive. Even within those limits, their behavior is extensively affected by the nature of their environments. An animal in a small cage behaves very differently from the same animal in the wild. The animal appears to be internally affected by its environment. That is, its reality in-and-for-itself is informed by its relations to the things in its environment. The organism is internally related to its environment.

Within extreme limits, a clock remains what it is, virtually unchanged, in many different environments. An account of the behavior of the clock can ignore its environment. Of course, a clock can be smashed by an axe. It is not impervious to external objects. But the impact of the axe on the clock is of the same order as that of one part of the clock on another. It is a mechanical force. The clock does not appear to be internally related to anything else.

When Enlightenment thinkers decided that the whole of nature operated in terms of mechanical forces, they concluded that the apparent difference between organisms and mechanisms was *only* apparent. In reality, they assumed, a deeper analysis of organisms would show that their behavior was also explained by efficient causes operating among their parts or on them from without. The effect of the environment upon them was also by external, mechanical causes. Organisms are no more purposeful or interconnected than machines.

Since the world operates mechanically, apparent wholes can be understood by analysis into their parts. Each of these parts can be analyzed into its parts, and so forth. This analysis should proceed until we arrive at those parts that are indivisible and therefore not further analyzable. These are the atoms. Ultimately, the whole natural world can, in principle, be explained by atoms moving in relation to one another according to the laws of motion.

The feature of this cosmology that most influenced the organization of research into academic disciplines was the view that the parts could be separated from one another for purposes of analysis. Their relations to one another were not important to understanding them. Hence bits and pieces of the totality of things could become the subject of an academic discipline that could then develop suitable methods of study with little attention to what was happening in other disciplines.

Of course, this simplifies matters in several ways. The most important is that it ignores another feature of the Enlightenment, its dualism. The more emphatically nature was denied any internality and purposiveness, the clearer it was that human minds are different from nature. The study of human minds and what they do in the world, accordingly, was separated sharply from the study of nature. Since Kant, this distinction has been formalized in terms of the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*. In English we often distinguish the sciences and the humanities.

Even so, both the sciences and the humanities are organized into *Wissenschaften*, or academic disciplines. These continued to be understood as each having its own subject matter, clearly demarcated in its separation from others. Each discipline, once established, was free to develop the methods it found most fruitful for the study of its subject matter. Analytical methods predominated in the humanities as in the natural sciences.

When the distinction was first established, the study of society was not far advanced. But as social studies developed, there was some question as to whether they should belong to the humanities or to the sciences. On the whole, they have preferred to be social sciences. Economics, in particular, has prided itself on its scientific character.

Economics has been particularly successful in establishing its subject matter as separate and distinct from the subject matter of other social sciences. It has developed its methods for investigating that subject matter. Like the natural sciences, it has transformed itself largely into mathematics. This is particularly true of the neo-liberal economics that is our topic.

Clearly this view of reality, which is presupposed in the disciplinary organization of knowledge, and specifically in the discipline of economics, is deeply alien to the worldview of both Buddhism and Christianity. Nothing could be more central to the Buddhist worldview than the profound interconnectedness of things. For Christians this has not been quite so explicit. But the understanding of the world in the Bible and in the Christian tradition prior to the Enlightenment is certainly organic rather than mechanistic. The Hebrew understanding of "the land" certainly implied relations to nature that are excluded in the mechanistic worldview.

Of course, there can be no denying that the separative and analytic approach has led to an enormous increase in information about the world and its processes. The Enlightenment and its expression in the organization of knowledge into academic disciplines has been a brilliant success. Nevertheless, from the point of view of both Buddhism and Christianity, the vast

increase in information has been gained at the price of a loss of wisdom.

Defenders of the academic disciplines often claim that all that is needed is that the results attained in the various disciplines be added to one another and integrated. But this is hardly possible. The results are formulated in categories peculiar to each discipline. Integrating even two disciplines turns out to be a truly formidable job. Furthermore, much about the world has been excluded from all the disciplines. For example, the complex interconnections of things are in principle excluded, as is the purposive element in all but the human. Even in the study of the human, there is some embarrassment about a full acknowledgment of the complexity of human purposes.

Despite this criticism, we can agree that when we keep in mind the abstraction that is involved in each discipline from reality as a whole, we can profit from the information offered without being led seriously astray. The problem comes when we move too directly from the findings of a discipline to application in the real world. At that point, neglect in practice of all that the discipline has neglected in theory can have disastrous results.

II. The Discipline of Economics

The discipline of economics is, today, being applied to reality without appreciation for the way it has abstracted particular features of that reality from the whole. Economists at their best know that human behavior in markets is only one aspect of human behavior. They recognize that the increase of market activity is only one contribution to human well-being. They acknowledge that there are other ways of studying human beings that also throw light on what policies should be pursued.

The problem is that our social and political leaders have decided that increased wealth is the most worthy of all goals. They rightly believe that knowledge of how wealth can be increased is the province of economic theory and that economists are those best qualified to guide policy toward this end. If we are to criticize economists, it is to point out that they have been all too willing to agree that wealth is the supreme goal and that, therefore, they are the best counselors of national and global policy. But our most basic criticism must be directed toward ourselves and our leaders, rather than toward the economists to whom we have turned for guidance.

Clearly Buddhists and Christians cannot agree that wealth is the supreme goal of social and political policy. Buddhists know that attachment to worldly goods, and certainly to their increase, blocks the path of spiritual advance.

A culture focused on this end is deeply sick. Christians believe the first task of government is justice, and they see that the pursuit of wealth profoundly interferes with the achievement of justice. We know also that Jesus was very explicit in asserting that we cannot serve both God and wealth.

That does not mean that either Buddhists or Christians oppose the acquisition of material goods. Buddhism is the middle way, eschewing asceticism. Christians believe that the Earth and all its creatures are good and that people are free to use its resources. Both Buddhists and Christians want the basic needs of all to be met. We do not oppose the enjoyment of additional goods. But we deeply, fundamentally, oppose placing the quest for wealth first. For Christians, the call is to seek first the Kingdom of God, a world in which God's will is done. Justice, peace, and meeting the basic needs of all are much higher priorities than simply increasing overall wealth.

Even if there were nothing else to criticize about economic theory, Buddhists and Christians would have to oppose the role that economic thought plays in our world today. But the general comments made thus far, point toward other features of Enlightenment thought that are fully adopted by the academic discipline of economics, especially in its neo-liberal form. We will turn now to two of them.

III. *Homo economicus*

First, economic theory is based on a particular view of human beings. Economists all know that *Homo economicus* is an abstraction from the fullness of human reality. This is just as true of *Homo politicus*, *Homo religiosus*, *Homo faber*, or *Homo ludens*. There is nothing wrong, in principle, with examining human behavior in market transactions in some separation from human behavior in political or religious activities.

Economists observed that when we buy and sell, we quite consistently seek to get the best bargains we can and sell as dearly as we can. When we need work, we try to get the best job we can, with pay a major consideration. When we need help, we try to get that as inexpensively as possible. Economists abstracted this tendency from all the other human tendencies and attributed it to *Homo economicus*. They describe *Homo economicus* as devoted to personal economic gain.

It is not the case, of course, that all of our economic activity conforms to this norm. For one thing, our economic dealings within the family rarely do. Economists recognize this, and often speak of households as the economic

units instead of individuals. But the boundaries of households are often blurred, and in any case households do not act consistently in purely self-serving ways. An interest in being fair, plays some role in our economic dealings. Also people give large sums of money, much of it out of concern to promote the general good or meet particular needs of others. Economists do not do well in accounting for these activities. But when all qualifications are made, it remains true that a great deal about human behavior in the marketplace can be described and predicted accurately when the people involved are viewed as economists see them.

Homo economicus is also understood to have insatiable wants. Some early economists thought that the goal of the economy was to produce sufficient goods to meet the needs of all. Growth would then give way to a steady-state economy. However, the profession as a whole rejected this view. It judged that human wants were insatiable. This did not mean that the desire for a particular good could not be satisfied. It meant that there was no limit to the new wants that could arise as old ones are satisfied. There is obviously a measure of truth in this understanding of human beings in their economic behavior. The kinds of things that would have satisfied me fifty years ago no longer suffice. For example, I want faster communications, easier travel, and more space and facilities in my home.

Clearly *Homo economicus* is a useful abstraction for many purposes. Nevertheless, when description passes over to prescription, consequences are often disastrous. With respect to the insatiability of desires, we do not simply observe this as a fact of human existence everywhere and at all places. On the contrary, we have created a system designed to generate new desires. Perfectly functional goods are quickly rendered obsolete by new designs. Styles are systematically changed from year to year to encourage new purchases. Much of the advertising industry is designed to persuade us to desire new things. Our whole economy is built on the basis of ever-increasing consumption, which, in turn, adds endlessly to the stress upon the environment. Creating unsatisfied wants fuels an unsustainable system.

It is obvious that neither Buddhism nor Christianity can support this doctrine or the practice that follows from it. Buddhism emphasizes that true life comes from the abandonment of all craving. Our system posits and encourages limitless craving. Christianity sometimes suggests that craving for spiritual goods is desirable, but it gives no support to craving for unneeded material possessions and consumption. There could hardly be a flatter contradiction.

The conflict is equally sharp with respect to the economist's view that human beings behave self-interestedly. Buddhists and Christians may agree that there is a strong tendency in this direction. But we deplore this and encourage other tendencies.

Economists, on the other hand, call the selfish behavior they describe "rational." They show that rational behavior leads to greater wealth not only on the part of those individuals who practice it but also in society as a whole. At this point, they tend to forget that wealth is only one of many goods, and that other academic disciplines study some of these other goods. Many of them forget that from the point of view of these other disciplines, human community is a value. Hence, they tend to advocate policies that support the behavior they call "rational," even though it erodes or destroys human community.

This encouragement of "rational" behavior played an important role in development thinking in the years after World War II. Development workers often found that the people they worked with were quite loath to leave the villages in which they lived. However, standard economic development theory focused on increasing productivity, that is, the amount of goods produced per hour of human labor. This could be accomplished best by industrialization. That required people working on small peasant farms to work in factories instead, which were located in urban centers. According to economic theory, they should be glad to go if the factories paid more than peasant work. But in fact, most of the people involved prized their community participation more than increased income. They were, in economic language, "irrational." Their traditionalism was an obstacle to economic progress. The great need was seen as "modernization" or "rationalization," which meant the subordination of community to economic growth.

If development economists had been more inclined to study history, they would have known that this was not a new problem. One factor that helped produce a labor force for the industrial revolution in England was the enclosure movement. When landholders shifted from peasant farming to raising sheep, far less labor was needed. Accordingly, they evicted peasants from their land. Those who had been evicted had no choice but wage labor, much of it in factories. When colonial governments in Africa found that natives were reluctant to work on plantations or roads, they required them to pay taxes in cash, which they could obtain only by wage labor. People are not by nature primarily *Homo economicus*. The social and economic system turns

them into this kind of creature. From the point of view of Buddhism and Christianity, this is not a gain.

In recent decades, a main contributor to creating a labor force for industrialization has been another part of the development model. According to the dominant economic development model, since traditional societies are primarily agricultural, agriculture should produce surpluses of internationally wanted products that would bring in foreign currencies needed for industrialization. Neo-colonial agribusiness was the best instrument for achieving this end. Accordingly, governments cooperated with international agricultural interests to enable them to create large plantations. By introducing modern agricultural practices and monoculture, these could increase productivity, that is, the amount produced by each worker. Peasants deprived of access to land and not needed in corporate agriculture contributed to the industrial labor force.

It is not only peasants who are forced to become more productive. The same is true of artisans. In traditional societies, there are specialists in the making of many needed goods. Shoes can serve as an example. The cobbler engages in the whole process of making a pair of shoes, often on order for a particular customer. There is pride and satisfaction in the work. Even if he can earn more by working in a factory, he will find the loss of job satisfaction outweighs the increased income.

However, once a shoe factory is established, most cobblers have no choice. The price of shoes produced by the shoe factory is well below the price at which they must sell in order to live. Some cobblers may survive by repairing factory-made shoes. But most must become part of the wage labor force.

Again, my purpose is to point out that the economists' description of how most of us act in our economic dealings most of the time, has become a norm. People who do not want to act that way are forced to do so. The values of *community* life and creative work are destroyed for the sake of the greater wealth that can be produced when people behave in the manner of *Homo economicus*.

The communities that are being destroyed now include national ones. When Adam Smith wrote in 1776, his goal was to increase the wealth of nations. He took national community for granted as the context of economic activity. But economic theory as such has no place for community. It demonstrates that the market works best when it is large. Indeed, the larger the better. This allows for the economies of scale, so important to economists, along

with the competition among corporations that is essential to the whole process. National boundaries are thus an impediment to economic efficiency. The goal, now largely realized, is a global economy.

Obviously, there is resistance. We are *Homo politicus* as well as *Homo economicus*. Until fairly recently, our overall global behavior reflected our political nature more than our economic nature. We fought wars for national advantage, not global economic gain. But today, nations like the United States, which would not dream of sacrificing sovereignty to an international political body such as the United Nations, are prepared to sacrifice it to economic institutions for the sake of economic growth.

Of course, the real destruction of national community is going on chiefly in poorer countries, as a result of structural adjustment and such treaties as NAFTA. The goal is the erasure of national boundaries so far as the economy is concerned. Since the governments are expected to serve the economy, they cannot act for the sake of national well-being in any terms beyond contributing to the growth of the global economy. Some economists assure them that by doing this, they will eventually share in the global prosperity, but thus far, and for the foreseeable future, this does not apply to most of their citizens. The gap in wealth between the affluent and the poor in each country has greatly increased. It is acutely difficult to maintain real national community between the newly affluent, who benefit from the global economy, and the disempowered and impoverished who are exploited by it. Similarly as the gap between affluent and impoverished nations grows, the ideal of a community of nations evaporates.

IV. Dualism

A second principle underlying economic theory is equally explicit and equally offensive to Buddhists and Christians. It is the dualism of the human and the natural. On this point also, Buddhist teaching is especially emphatic. The rejection of dualism is central to the Buddhist worldview. Christians, especially Western Christians, on the other hand, have had dualistic tendencies for centuries.

Nevertheless, today, Christian theologians for the most part reject dualism, at least in its more extreme forms, and biblical scholars point out that it is alien to the Bible. We Christians are repenting of having succumbed to dualistic thinking through the influence of Greek thought and, especially, in extreme form, the effects of Enlightenment thought on Protestantism.

As a penitent Christian, I join Buddhists in strongly opposing this dualism.

But no such repentance is occurring in the mainstream of economic thought. For traditional economists, and emphatically for neo-liberal ones today, the only value that is recognized is that of human satisfaction. The only form of satisfaction that is recognized is that derived from the possession or consumption of desired goods and services. Economists encourage the ordering of the economy to the end of increasing human satisfaction.

The only value that can be attributed to the non-human world is instrumental. It can serve toward the satisfaction of human wants. Its value is the price that someone is prepared to pay for it. It is viewed as a commodity.

Given the standard Enlightenment view of the world as composed of human subjects and non-human objects, this dualism of humans and commodities seems appropriate. It is derived from the idea that the non-human world is available for the market, so that market forces can price it, and economists recognize that this is not quite true. For example, people value unspoiled landscapes, which are not for sale in the market. However, this is viewed as a minor qualification. Economists can approximate a market-price by asking people how much they would pay to preserve this landscape and multiplying the figure by the number of people who would be willing to pay it.

The dualism is applied, with few qualms, when considering non-human animals. A cow is worth whatever price it brings in the market. The same is true of a cat. The cat's value may be raised by human sentiment, but there is still likely to be some price at which its owners would part with it. What is totally omitted is the value of the cow or the cat for itself, the satisfactions it derives from being alive.

Christianity historically has not been very clear about the intrinsic value of animals. It fell victim to Enlightenment dualism with little struggle. Nevertheless, it is beginning a process of repentance, and I personally insist that as Christians we have strong reasons to oppose the denial by economic theory of all value to animals. The affirmation of such value has been strongest and clearest in the religions of India. Buddhism shares in that heritage, although its commitment to the intrinsic value of animals has been seriously weakened in its East Asian forms. Still, this commitment is sufficiently prominent in the tradition to provide contemporary Buddhists with a basis for protest against the economic theory that the only value of animals is the price humans will pay for them and the factory farming that it supports.

The commodification of nature expresses itself in other ways. In traditional society, much is held in common. Indeed, the natural environment is

thought of more as part of the community than as a possession. The dualism of the economist is absent. All members of the community can have access to the forests and streams, and sometimes also the pastureland.

To many neo-liberal economists, this practice appears irrational. Since these goods have value, they should be privatized and priced, so that those who use them will pay for this use. Privatization insures the most economic use of the resources.

Of course, privatization also favors those in a position to purchase them and damages the poor. Today, one feature of the negotiations over the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas is the privatization of water. Dualism drives in the direction of the commodification of everything. Of course, the policy of privatization also expresses the primacy of the commitment to increase wealth over the goal of meeting the needs of the poor. At this point, Buddhists and Christians can join humanists of many stripes in protesting.

Christians can be much clearer in their opposition to the reduction of the value of natural things to their price than about the intrinsic value of animals. As we have become aware of impending scarcities, we have realized that market-price is a poor guide even to the instrumental value of commodities to human beings. For example, as long as there are large pools of oil in the ground, the price of oil will be determined by the policies of oil-producing countries as to how much to pump. Oil could remain plentiful in the market until very near the time that it was, for practical purposes, exhausted. Indeed, if OPEC does not control production with somewhat longer-term concerns in view, market forces will probably lead to that outcome. The actual value of oil for human society is far greater than the market-price. The additional price will be paid when we are forced to make a rather abrupt transition to other forms of energy. It would be much better if oil were priced accordingly, but the market will not accomplish that. It can be done only if the political order, which can reflect longer-term concerns, takes precedence over the commitment to the economic one.

The critique here is that the market to which economists turn for establishing value is shortsighted. Human beings are capable of rational judgments based on a longer view of things. Christian teaching has been clear that this historical perspective is important. We need to identify our calling in terms of where we stand in an ongoing history. If we do so, we will recognize needs before market-prices reflect them. This does not directly challenge economists' dualism, but it does object to the conclusions they draw from it.

More broadly, the dualism of the economists has rendered them as a group largely indifferent to the degradation of the Earth. One can, of course, find economic reasons for avoiding this degradation. But the struggle to save the natural environment has not been led by those who view it as a commodity. It has been led by those who see it as having value in itself and as intimately interconnected with human well-being. I count Buddhists and Christians among these. For twenty years, the World Council of Churches has spoken of Christian commitment to the “integrity of creation.” Christians have debated exactly what that phrase means, but we all know that it expresses the conviction that God cares about the creation and that the interconnectedness of things in the created order must be recognized and protected. Economics as an academic discipline has not internalized any such principle. It is our duty to critique the dualistic theory and oppose the practices that follow from it.

V. Can We Propose as Well as Oppose?

Many Buddhists and Christians believe that community as such has values, and that communities often preserve and transmit rich traditions that make for a good life. We believe that many traditional communities were much more sustainable and better integrated with their natural environments than are the societies with which development and economic globalization have replaced them. We believe that modern economic development has destroyed, and is still destroying, much of great value. The Buddhist and Christian critique of the application of economic thinking to the real world is very harsh.

But when we protest this destruction, we are often challenged to show that there is another way of responding to global poverty. All of us agree that in the years after World War II, there were unmet human needs in many parts of the world. In many villages, most infants failed to reach the age of one. Preventable diseases ravaged whole countries. Hunger was a frequent problem. Development was intended to overcome these problems. Could Buddhists or Christians oppose development?

Furthermore, we should not romanticize the virtues of village life. It was often highly exploitative. Sometimes, as in India, there were whole classes of the excluded. Women were often degraded. Sometimes, as in parts of Africa, they were the objects of appalling operations. Development was intended to break the power of unjust and destructive traditions. Could we oppose that?

That would certainly not have been a possible position for Buddhists and

Christians. The question was not then and is not now whether there should be development. The question was and is, what kind of development is helpful. After fifty years of development that has been highly successful in increasing global wealth, none of the problems that validly called for development has been solved. Where there has been progress, as in infant survival, this has resulted from targeted programs more than from the general increase of wealth. To challenge the pursuit of global wealth is not to oppose development, but to call for that kind of development that genuinely responds to urgent human need.

Supporters of present economic policies often speak as if the alternative to global capitalism is state socialism, and they rightly point to its limitations. Buddhists and Christians have generally been quite aware of these limitations. But the issue is, in fact, quite different. The alternative to the top-down development programs of both global capitalism and state socialism is bottom-up development.

Bottom-up development is often called community development. Instead of viewing persons as individual atoms related to one another through contracts and market transactions, we view people as persons-in-community, valuing the relations that constitute community. Our interest is in developing communities and thereby improving the situation of the persons who make them up.

This is the kind of development that Gandhi promoted. A symbol of Gandhian development was the sewing-machine. This kind of simple technology would enable women in villages to use their time efficiently and profitably during periods when they did not need to work in the fields. Gandhi also worked to overcome the discrimination against the untouchables in these villages. Gandhian development is open to improving the situation of women socially as well as economically. Village development should be, can be, and often is, both economic and ethical. At every point, it should involve the villagers in decision-making. They often know their problems and needs better than anyone else. Also, if they have ownership over the woods-plots or pumps that improve their community life, they will care for them and keep them operative. The cost of improving conditions within villages is usually modest in relation to the returns.

Often villagers already have a strong sense of their interconnection with their environment and of the importance of maintaining or developing a sustainable relationship. When they act in unsustainable ways, this is often because their traditional systems have been disrupted and they can survive

only by destructive practices. Their unsustainable activities are usually the consequence of top-down development. The task of bottom-up development is to counter these effects.

The Buddhist Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka adopted the Gandhian vision. Here, too, the primary focus has been on the restoration and strengthening of village life. Local irrigation systems, destroyed by British colonial governments, are being rebuilt, and the water buffalo agriculture, renewed.

Of course, top-down development has already driven many people from traditional villages into the slums surrounding great metropolitan areas. It is too late for village development to help them. Another bottom-up model has been developed in the new urban context. It began in Bangladesh and has spread around the world. This is micro-lending.

Small sums are loaned to poor, enterprising individuals, to start their own tiny businesses. Most of the recipients are women. Often they gather in mutual support groups. The results have been astonishingly successful. The great majority of the borrowers repay their loans and significantly increase their incomes. Their self-esteem and ability to support others also increase markedly. Buddhists and Christians can support this kind of development with enthusiasm.

Most Buddhist and Christian development activity around the world has this bottom-up character in one form or another. Hence, I am not simply describing a theoretical ideal. The problem is that this is sometimes thought of as the consequence of limited resources rather than basic conviction. Many who support this kind of development also give moral and political support to the top-down policies that dominate the global economic system. It is incumbent on those of us who are in a position to influence the thinking of faithful people to make clear that the neo-liberal economic thought that informs most current top-down development, riding roughshod over communities, and reshaping the lives and thinking of hundreds of millions of people, is based on assumptions that are antithetical to ours. We should articulately and unequivocally withdraw moral support from these practices and encourage all who truly care about human beings and the other beings that make up our Earth, to work directly for their benefit.