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### **Environmental Responsibility and Business Styles: Ethical and Theological Perspectives**

#### 1. Business as Partner for Sustainability

Among the many important lessons learned between the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the Summit in Johannesburg is the recognition that efforts to correct socio-economic systems that adversely affect our life-supporting environment, will not work without meaningful inclusion of the business community. At the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the role of business in sustainable development was poorly understood. The 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit marks a quantum leap in business thinking on environmental issues! It was also a historic opportunity to further the role of business in advancing sustainable development. In fact, this Summit was characterised by a widespread recognition that unless business joins in partnership and works together with other actors including the government and the civil society, there will be no lasting and effective solutions to environmental degradation.

The corporate world was well prepared for Johannesburg. Hundreds of international firms sent their top management to participate in the various events – and offer their views and good faith to liberate economic growth from pollution and social decay. In fact, a statement issued by the leading members of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development – a group including the heads of Dupont, Dow, BP, Shell, Norsk Hydro, Ontario Power Generation, Toyota and others – read as follows: “We feel a responsibility ... to restate our vision of the relationships between responsible companies and the goal of sustainable human progress”.

The Johannesburg Political Declaration confirmed the world leaders’ commitment to implement a number of international agreements on sustainability and on fairness in trade, including Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, the Monterrey Conference on Finance and Development and the Doha Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Trade. It also recognised that “globalisation has added a new dimension” to the pursuit of sustainability through the “rapid integration of markets, mobility of capital and significant increase in investment flows around the world.”

Finally, the world community has recognised that creating a more human society, with less poverty and a higher level of security and health, requires better distribution and management of available resources. Businesses, the motors of the world’s economies, are in the best position to help achieve this distribution – but so far they have contributed relatively little to the effort. To remedy this lack of corporate responsibility to eco-efficiency, the Johannesburg Political Declaration states that “In pursuit of the legitimate activities, the private sector, both large and small companies, have a duty to contribute to the evolution of equitable and sustainable communities and societies.”

While the Johannesburg Summit may not have produced the kind of dramatic visible changes that many environmentalists wanted to see, the inclusion of businesses in the quest for sustainability is a major step – the importance of which should not be underestimated.

Now that enlightened business leaders have become more conscious and conscientious about their moral responsibility towards the environment and about their moral obligation to collaborate with the civil and political community in order to ensure ecological sustainability, the crucial philosophical and religious issue is precisely how integrate this newly awakened ethical sensibility in a coherent and convincing moral theory and religious perspective. What sort of framework of ethical principles is needed to underpin this emerging environmental

concern among the business community? What balancing considerations between business and public interests can be validly institutionalized as public policies? What moral values should shape the background of the responsible entrepreneurs' choice for 'good practices' to reduce harmful environmental impacts? What insights can theology contribute to the contemporary ecological awareness, particularly regarding the moral responsibilities of industry to safeguard the environment for both present and future generations?

## 2. Ethical Values, Business and Sustainability

The late Willis Herman, founder of the World Business Academy, wrote in 1990 that: "Business has become, in this half century, the most powerful institution on the planet. A dominant institution in any society needs to take responsibility for the whole ... But business has not had such a tradition. This is a new role, not yet well understood and accepted."<sup>1</sup> After the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, the business community pledged to take up this new role as a challenge. If business is to build trust, it needs to show that it has a human face. Unless business takes ethical and social issues into its strategic thinking, its drive for profit can be catastrophic for the environment and for vulnerable people in poor countries.

The international business community is now realising that the short-term approach in the management of business and industry is a myopic perspective that must be reshaped to reflect the changing concerns and deep-seated values. As United States Secretary General Kofi Annan said in Johannesburg, "the business community had come to realise that if it wished to thrive in a complex and sometimes hostile global economy, it had to respond to the major social and environmental trends and challenges reshaping the world." Businesses that want to survive and prosper in a world of change will need to have strong ethical values and standards. Good business and sustainable development go hand in hand. As the Director of the Shell Company said, "our commitment to contribute to sustainable development holds the key to our long-term business success." Of course, some aspects of ethics are concerned with the rules and sanctions, but there are more advantages in viewing ethics and values as drivers for the long-term sustainability of a business.

The ethical principle of eco-efficiency was spelled out in the introduction of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development as follows:

"We commit ourselves to undertake concrete actions and measures at all levels and to enhance international cooperation, [taking into account the Rio Principles, in particular (the principle of) common but differentiated responsibilities) as set out in principle 7)]. These efforts will also promote the integration of the three components of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars. Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and protection and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development.

The new concept of eco-efficiency implies that ethics and values are at the foundation of any business company which incorporates sustainability as its management strategy. Beyond doubt, the business sector has an important role to play in sustainable development. Successful global businesses will be those that integrate sustainable development, including social responsibility, into business strategies. As the Brundtland Commission reported in 1987, "human survival and well-being could depend on the success in elevating sustainable development to a global ethic". This report encouraged the emergence of global ethical standards for all sectors of civil society, including the business community. As a result of this newly awakened moral sensibility, individual companies and industry sectors developed their own standards and are striving now to apply them consistently without compromising their core values. Business cannot operate in a vacuum insulated from the outside world and from the realm of ethics.

One of the earliest initiatives to address global issues affected by the performance and conduct of international business was taken by the Caux Round Table (CRT) which was

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<sup>1</sup> Willis Harman, Statement reproduced on *World Business Academy Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1993.

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launched in 1987 by senior business leaders from Europe, Japan and North America. The CRT has increasingly focused its attention on issues of global corporate responsibility in the context of the social, political, economic and technological changes taking place in the world. In 1994, the CRT published its *Principles for Business*, which seek to express a worldwide standard for ethical and responsible corporate behaviour and is offered as a foundation for dialogue and action by business and leaders worldwide. One of its paragraphs reads as follows: "Business enterprises shall carry out their activities in accordance with laws and policies relating to the preservation of the environment of the countries in which they operate and shall generally conduct their activities in a manner contributing to the wider goal of sustainable development." Moreover, the International Chamber of Commerce endorsed this same concern for environmental protection as one of its priority in its Business Charter for Sustainable Development launched in 1991.

After the two Earth Summits in 1992 and 2002, the need for sustainable development has never been clearer. Now, it has become equally clear and evident that business companies have an essential role in contributing to this journey – finding innovative ways of meeting present and future needs that are socially and environmentally sustainable. Since the world economy depends on a base of natural resources that is being severely degraded, reducing consumption and waste creates new opportunities for businesses to grow through the innovation of less wasteful process and with life-enhancing goods and services. Eco-efficiency helps wealthier countries to grow more qualitatively than quantitatively. It also helps developing countries to continue to grow qualitatively while saving resources. To achieve this goal, businesses should be prepared to report on their social and environmental performance as well as their financial performance in an integrated manner. In other words, a company's social responsibility means those positive actions or responses it takes to help discharge its responsibilities to external stakeholders such as the communities in which it operates and to the environment. Put simply, it is the ethical behaviour of a company towards society. This is often called corporate citizenship.

In Johannesburg, Philip Watts, chairperson of World Business Council for Sustainable Development, explained succinctly eco-efficiency as follows:

Business is good for sustainable development and that sustainable development is good for business. It means tough choices and new thinking. For instance, you choose to work by a set of declared principles and to stick to them whatever the circumstances. We have to learn to change. We need to stimulate innovation that allows us to create wealth in ways that reflect changing concerns and deep-seated values. We should be taking on eco-efficiency as a management strategy – seeing how we can create more value with less impact in terms of energy and material.

Environmental degradation cannot be effectively addressed without a meaningful commitment to eradicate poverty. The business community should take measures to ensure that economic growth in both the poor and rich countries can go hand in hand with the protection of the environment. The eradication of poverty should be the business community's priority. The shortest route to a cleaner and sustainable environment is to raise standards of living in the developing world. Through development and economic growth the business community can create the resources to step up protection of our environment. In other words, economic growth is the key to both eradication of poverty and to a better environment. As Tokyo Sexwale, Business Coordinating Forum of South Africa, stated in Johannesburg:

"Our commitment to sound environmental practice implies not only adherence to more stringent standards, but to ensure that the communities in which we operate have access to basic services like water, health, education and food security; that our operations do not adversely affect the health of the people living in close proximity to our factories and mines; that on completion of operations in an area, rehabilitation should occur."

### 3. Sustainability and Future Generations

Sustainable development or 'development without destruction' means forms of progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The defense and improvement of the environment for

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present and future generations has become an imperative goal for humankind. This implies, in the first place, a basic obligation to conserve options for future generations by maintaining to the maximum extent possible the diversity of the natural resources base. The second basic obligation, following from the duty to hold the natural heritage of mankind in trust for future generations, concerns the prevention of pollution or other forms of degradation of natural resources or the environment, which would reduce the range of uses to which the natural resources or environment could be put or which would confront future generations with enormous financial burdens to clean up the environment.

The ethical principles of sustainable development are now well-known and widely-accepted: respect and care for the community of life, improve the quality of human life, conserve the Earth's vitality and diversity, minimise the depletion of non-renewable resources, keep within the Earth's carrying capacity, and change personal attitudes and practices. According to the last ethical principle, the present generation is morally obliged to adopt the ethic of living sustainably. This means that people must re-examine their values and alter their behaviour. Society must promote values that support the new ethic and discourage those that are incompatible with a sustainable way of life. An ethic for living sustainably is important because what people do depends on what they believe. As the Anglo-American philosopher once claimed: "As we think, we live". Widely shared beliefs are often more powerful than government policies. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development put it very forcefully when it declared that unless representatives of the people, including the business community, fundamentally change their lives, people may lose confidence, seeing their representatives as nothing more than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals.

Business needs to be integrated in an ethics of sustainability to ensure high quality of environment and a healthy economy for all present and future people. Most current development fails because it meets human needs incompletely. We need development that is people-centred, future-oriented and conservation-based, concentrating on improving the human condition and maintaining the variety and productivity of nature for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Why do future generations feature so prominently in an ethics of sustainability? How is posterity related to business' responsibility to build a sustainable future? Why should business ethics adopt an intergenerational perspective?

The increasing awareness of the finitude and fragility of our one and only Earth has brought about a sudden and amazing upgrading of the theme of the 'future' in almost every area of contemporary life. Questions previously asked by a few specialists have now become the concern of the public at large. What is the future of our one and only Earth? Does humankind have a future? If present trends continue, what kind of planet will be inherited by future generations? What quality of life will be enjoyed by posterity? Who can guarantee the future of the human species? Do we have any obligation at all to unborn generations? Can future generations claim anything from us as their right?

An impressive series of conventions, charters, documents, agreements and treaties adopted by international conferences and international organisations, in particular the United Nations, some of which deal with global issues, others are regional in their application, promote our responsibilities towards unborn generations. Since the 1972 Stockholm U.N. Conference on the Human Environment, most countries, whatever their political systems or levels of economic development, have in general shown a remarkable willingness to adopt new rules to regulate environmental issues. Many of these environmental policies specifically single out the responsibilities of the present generation to bequeath to posterity a world worth living in.

Two main factors underlay the contemporary ethical sensibility for future generations. First, it has now become evident that technological power has altered the nature of human activity. Whereas previously human activity was viewed as having a small effective range, modern technology has reshaped this traditional view. Modern technology has given us an

unprecedented power to influence the lives not only of those now living, but also of those who will live in the far-distant future<sup>2</sup>.

Secondly, today's apprehension about the future of mankind is the result of the discovery of the interdependence and inter-relatedness of reality. This truth has been known for centuries; but it is only lately that we are experiencing it in all its complexity. Never before has human experience shown so clearly that absolutely nothing exists in isolation. Everything affects everything else. Every action, decision and policy whatsoever has far-reaching consequences. Everything, from culture to genes, will be transmitted to posterity. It is therefore becoming more evident that our relations are not merely limited to those who are close to us, but extend to far-distant generations. This feeling of interdependence between generations is awakening a new vision of human community that encompasses all past, present and future generations. The contemporary sense of solidarity with all the members of the human species is the result of this emerging broader perception of community.

Future generations need to be protected because they are in a disadvantaged position with respect to the present generation who has the power to affect badly their quality of life by overpopulating the earth, by implementing business policies that aim to enhance present profits with accumulated burdens for the future, by spoiling the delicate balance of the biosphere, by storing nuclear waste which are disastrous to the genetic heritage of posterity, by depleting the earth's natural resources and by using genetic engineering to affect the unity of the human species.

They are disadvantaged because they are "downstream" in time from us and thus subject to the long-term consequences of our actions. Even their very existence is threatened! The scope of their choices is restricted by decisions taken by their predecessors. Moreover, future generations are inherently disadvantaged since they are "mute", having no representatives among the present generation, and so their interests are often neglected in present socio-economic and political planning. They cannot plead or bargain for equal treatment since they have no voice and nothing they do will affect the present generation.

The present generation has the power to prevent future generations from enjoying natural resources. In this century we have seen increasing degradation of the quality of global natural environment, particularly air, water, forests and soils, caused by pollution. Waste products are an integral part of our system. Recent generations have used resources of air, water and soil as a free resource for dumping their wastes, thereby passing on the costs of their activities to future generations in the form of degraded quality of air and water, with accompanying harms to planet and animal life and to human health. The concern of recent generations to reap short-term benefits from cheap disposal of wastes has created immense future risks and burdens!

Moreover, some actions of the present generation degraded environmental quality so badly that future generations will have less flexibility in using their natural resources. Certain areas are becoming so heavily polluted that certain uses are precluded. Furthermore, the pollution of certain actions leads to the depletion of plant and animal life. For example, toxic pollution of lakes damages not only fisheries but also destroys certain plant and animal life in the region.

#### 4. Business Styles and Intergenerational Justice

The responsibility of the international business community to integrate the concept of sustainability into its operations in order safeguard the environment for both present and future generations is a matter of justice. Much of the recent discussions on future generations focus on how to ground our ecological responsibilities in a normative ethical theory. This is seen as important because an ethical theory can give us criteria for evaluating whether a proposed action is right or wrong. Does it make sense to speak of justice between generations in business and environmental issues? Can corporate responsibility to safeguard

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<sup>2</sup> Agius, E., "Germ-line Cells: Our Responsibilities to Future Generations", in *Ethics in the Natural Sciences (Concilium)*, pp. 293-313.

the environment for posterity be grounded in justice? Can a theory of intergenerational justice adequately frame today's growing moral sensibility among the international business community to take concrete steps not to bequeath a plundered world to our descendants? Evidently, the discourse on justice leads us to the language of rights and obligations? If something is claimed as a matter of justice, it implies that one's right to obtain that object must be respected? But can non-existent persons claim something as their right? Can we have duties to persons who do not yet exist?

Some philosophers claim that in stipulating obligations of justice towards future generations, we argue on duties towards human beings who are not yet born and whom we cannot "see" as individual persons.<sup>3</sup> We have no material relations at all with them. How can a moral commitment exist towards these shadowy figures? How can we grant moral status to people who do not yet exist or who might even not exist at all? How can we rationally ground our obligations to unborn generations whose identity is dependent or contingent on so many factors?

There certainly is, in daily life, an "irrational" preference for that which is proximate in space and time. This preference can be tested in those instances when it is quite clear that the needs of the present can only be met by neglecting the needs of the future. I think that one can say that present-day official discourse in environmental context does not consider mere temporal distance as a sufficient reason to diminish the weight of the interests of future generations. It is quite another matter, of course, that contemporary environmental policies aim to shape an economic state of affairs (the notion of "sustainability") which avoids the sacrifice of the future for the present.

In this section my claim is that the business community's moral obligations to future generations, and consequently their moral responsibility to set up a legal mechanism to defend their rights and interests, are rooted in a concept of social justice redefined from an intergenerational perspective. This theory of intergenerational justice which supports the idea of trusteeship or stewardship "strikes a deep chord" with Islamic, Judeo-Christian, African and other traditions: 'Nearly all human traditions recognise that we living, are sojourners on earth, and temporary stewards of our resources'.<sup>4</sup> The grounding of the business community's moral responsibility towards future generations in a sound and coherent philosophical and ethical perspective will then be followed by a discussion on theological insights.

Rawls' theory of justice as fairness gives due consideration to the question of justice between generations. As Rawls himself admits, "the account of justice as fairness would be incomplete without some discussion of this important matter".<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, he claims that a theory of justice has to apply to all members, whether they are living intra-temporally or inter-temporally.<sup>6</sup> In spite of these claims, his theory of justice is characterised by shortcomings that render it inadequate to frame philosophically the newly awakened sense of moral responsibility towards generations yet to be born.

A.N. Whitehead defines his own philosophical perspective as a "resolute attempt to enlarge the understanding of the scope of application of every notion which enters into our current thought".<sup>7</sup> Therefore, an important feature of the Whiteheadian philosophical system is the widening in scope of the application of concepts. The vision of the past, present and future reality as a unified whole implies a new perspective that can be employed for the reinterpretation of various concepts from a broader standpoint. Whitehead adopts this approach because he believes that "traditional ideas are never static. They are either fading into meaningless formulae, or are gaining power by new light thrown by more delicate

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<sup>3</sup> Parfit, D., "On Doing the Best for Our Children", in (Bayles, M., ed.) *Ethics and Population*, Cambridge, Mass., Schenkman, 1976, pp. 100-115. Cf. Agius, E., *The Rights of Future Generations. In Search of an Intergenerational Ethical Theory*, Leuven, catholic University of Leuven, 1986, pp. 124-138.

<sup>4</sup> Brown Weiss, E., "In Fairness to Future Generations", in *American Journal of International Law and Policy*, no 8, pp. 19-20, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1980, p.284.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>7</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, p.171.

apprehension".<sup>8</sup> Following this Whiteheadian axiom, it is worth to examine how the process theory of intergenerational ethics throws new light on the concepts of moral responsibility, common good and social justice. It is only such a 'generality of outlook', to use Whitehead's own words<sup>9</sup> to describe the vision of an interrelated and interdependent reality, that leads us to a 'morality of outlook' with its broadened ethical notions that encompass the community of humankind as a whole, extending beyond present space and time. The redefinition of these concepts is essential for the construction of an adequate intergenerational theory.

i. One of the basic insights of the Whiteheadian paradigm of reality is the essential interrelatedness and interdependence of all reality. Nothing exists in isolation. Everything is related to the whole. Reality is an interconnected web of relations which are intrinsically dynamic. The relational understanding of social reality presents a vision of the past, present and future as an integrated totality. According to this metaphysical outlook of reality, the human race is indivisibly one, and all human beings, no matter whether they are living now and in the future, are interrelated, and as such belong to one and the same organic whole and family.

An important dimension of Whitehead's ethical theory arises from the interrelated character of reality. The morality of human activity is inseparably linked with the degree of its impact on the whole of reality. Time plays therefore an important role in a Whiteheadian ethical perspective which demands that technological and business policies have to be morally assessed within the context of the whole community of the humankind. Moreover, process ethics is characterised by its concern for the future: "The effect of the present on the future is the business of morals" (*Modes of Thought*, 380). The future-orientation of Whiteheadian ethics is attested by the fact that a large part of his concept of morality centres on the implications of the present actions for the future: "The greater part of morality hinges on the determination of relevance in the future" (*Adventures of Ideas*, p. 346). Relational ethics is concerned with the present because it is 'a pledge for the future' (*Process and Reality*, p.41 [27]). The future is best served by trying to achieve maximal beauty of experience, for in becoming 'objectively immortal', the goodness attained becomes a contribution to the future. The future is the final judge of whether an action is morally good or evil. In other words, the transition from the present to the future is the process measure of value. Process ethics could be therefore conceived of as the claim of the unborn on the living.

Now, in a Whiteheadian ethical perspective, the notion of responsibility is characterised by these two basic features. Since every human decision counts both for the present as well as for the future, process ethics defines human responsibility in a twofold way. First, responsibility demands intensity of experience in the present. We are obliged to enhance the structure of experience inherited from the past. Since 'stagnation is a deadly foe to morality' (PR, 19), moral responsibility requires more than simply preserving that which is transmitted from the past. Accordingly, process ethics approves all technological and business policies which enhance the cumulative structural experience of humanity. In Whiteheadian ethical perspective, it follows that policies adopted to increase the quality of life in the present are morally justified.

Since every moral decision is itself a process and involves a relation to the future, Whitehead contends that we are duty-bound to take very seriously into account not only the creative advance of the present but also that of the future. This is the second dimension of responsibility, namely the responsibility for the consequences of our activity on others. Who are the others for whom we are responsible? The whole question hinges on Whitehead's notion of 'relevant future' (PR 41[27]). Since 'no unit can separate itself from the others and from the whole' (*Modes of Thought*, 111), human activity affects the whole network of relations and its consequences extend into the far-distant future beyond imagination. It is therefore not the agent's future that is relevant but the whole future, namely that of humankind. We are obliged to consider the effects which our actions and decisions are bound to have on all humankind. Responsibility is therefore solidarity with the whole community of the human species.

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<sup>8</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*, pp.187-188.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehead, A.N., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, New York Macmillan, 1929, p. 23 (15)

What is the position of process thought in cases of uncertainties? Should we proceed with business policies even when we are still unclear about consequences? Whitehead stresses the point that responsibility demands foresight. It is foresight of the present impact upon the future that makes the agent morally responsible. 'Foresight is the product of insight' (*Adventure of Ideas*, p.113). Where there is no such foresight, there is no morality. As moral agents capable of foresight, we are therefore obliged to consider all possible consequences on the future that might follow our activity. The arrogant tendency to proceed with business policies without considering all possible consequences on the future is unethical and irresponsible.

ii. One of the central notions of social ethics is that of common good. This concept has always been defined in accordance with a particular notion of society. For instance, in the individualistic and liberal theories of society, the common good is defined as the mere sum of individual goods. It is a state of equilibrium in the interplay of individual goods. By contrast, in a collectivist social theory, the common good is that state of society in which a certain social status is planned and ensured for every individual by directing and contributing his activities. Now, the process paradigm of human society is different from that of the individualistic and collectivist social theories. What concept of common good does the process vision of human society offer?

Compared to the traditional view, the concept of common good is defined from a much broader perspective within a Whiteheadian system. The 'generality of outlook' leads to a notion of common good that is broader than the good of a particular society, and even than that of the global community. The common good is the good of mankind as a whole. Relational metaphysics gives a philosophical reason for the broadening in scope of the notion of common good from a national to the supranational, from the supranational to the common good of mankind. The interrelatedness of all reality links every particular actuality to the whole, which encompasses the past, the present and the future. Since the ultimate community to which every human person belongs is the whole community of mankind, the common good of a particular society cannot be separated, firstly, from the common good of the world community, and from the common good of all mankind.

During the sixties the concept of common good evolved from a national to a supranational level. This was the result of the newly awakened sense of interdependence that led to the notion of the 'family of nations'. During the late seventies the concept of common good was redefined from a broader perspective. Environmental issues have shown that the common good of a particular society cannot be separated, first from the common good of the world community, and secondly from the common good of the human species.

Traditionally, the common good has been defined as that order in the community by virtue of which, every member of society can experience an adequate quality of life. Recent ecological awareness has made it quite evident that the concept of common good must include also the natural resources of the earth. Every species-being, both living now and in the future, needs an adequate natural environment for his/her well-being. The human species is not apart from nature, but a part of nature. Every human species therefore needs natural resources for his survival and his quality of life. Accordingly, the natural resources should not be the privilege for some and a source of frustration for many, but the good of humankind as a whole. The atmosphere, the oceans, the outer space and all the natural resources belong to all generations. Hence, our ownership of these resources is only ours in so far as we form part of the human species. In the use of these common heritages, we have therefore to consider the interests of the human species as a whole.

iii. Human beings have differed greatly in the accounts they have given of the concept of 'justice'. They have spelt out the meanings and the practical implications of such phrases as 'giving everyone his due' in many different ways. But they have always agreed on a number of basic points.

The first is that justice is essential to human conviviality; secondly, that justice is not merely a matter concerning the relations between one individual and another; in traditional terms, "commutative justice". It also implies duties of individual towards the community or communities to which they belong; in traditional terms, "social justice". Thirdly, the concept of

justice is logically connected with the concepts of "equality" and "proportion"; hence the requirement that an individual contribute to the welfare of the community has particular relevance to the question of proper conduct towards the needier and weaker members of humankind.

Social justice refers both to the duty of every member to contribute to the common good of the community, and to the responsibility of the community to all its members, with particular regard to those in a disadvantaged situation. Social justice demands the respect of everyone's right to share in the common good.

Social justice appeals to the principle that a community has the moral duty to give particular help to its handicapped or weaker members - not in terms of 'desert' or 'reward' for their contribution to the productive process, but simply because of human solidarity. Future generations can also be seen as 'handicapped', and the claim to reserve resources for their quality of life is based on similar ground to that on which it is argued that the State is bound in justice to make welfare provisions for the aged, the physically and mentally handicapped, and so on.

The resources of the earth belong to all generations. No country, continent, generation, or business company has an exclusive right to the natural resources of the earth. These resources have been handed over from past generations; it is therefore our responsibility to pass them on in good and enhanced condition to posterity. We have an obligation grounded on social justice to share the common heritage with all the present population as well as with future generations. Social justice forbids any generation to exclude other generations from a fair share in the benefits of the common heritage of humankind. In other words, social justice demands a sense of solidarity with the whole family of humankind. We have an obligation to regulate our current consumption in order to share our resources with the poor and with unborn generations.

iv. Some have argued that we can escape our responsibilities towards unborn generations. They claim that since future generations are distant in time, our ignorance of their needs, as well as their contingency, are sufficient reasons to discount the future altogether<sup>10</sup>. The concept of social justice from an intergenerational perspective proves the weakness of these arguments.

To achieve justice between generations, it is important to recognise the following principles of intergenerational responsibilities<sup>11</sup>:

- a) First, each generation should be required to conserve the diversity of the natural and cultural resource base, so that it does not unduly restrict the options available to future generations in solving their problems and satisfying their own values. This principle may be called "*conservation of options*".
- b) Second, each generation should be required to maintain the quality of life of the planet so that it is passed on in no worse condition than the present generation received it, and should be entitled to a quality of the planet comparable to the one enjoyed by previous generations. This is the principle of "*conservation of quality*." The principle of conserving quality does not mean that the environment must remain unchanged. Conservation of environmental quality and economic development must go together to ensure sustained benefits of the planet for both present and future generations. Thus the concept of 'sustainable development' which was a central principle at Rio Earth Summit ensures present generation to meet its needs without however compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- c) Third, each generation should provide its members with equitable rights of access to the legacy from past generations and should conserve this access for future generations. This is the principle of "*conservation of access*." Each generation can use resources to improve their own economic and social well-being provided that they respect their equitable duties to future

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<sup>10</sup> Agius, E., *The Rights of Future Generations. In Search of an Intergenerational Ethical Theory*, pp. 124-136.

<sup>11</sup> Brown Weiss, E., *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity*, pp.197-103.

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generations. In the intergenerational context, conservation of access implies that all people, including future generations, should have a minimum level of access to the common patrimony.

#### 5. The Ecological Crisis as a Moral Problem

Theology, or 'faith seeking understanding', is the systematic reflection on human experience. One of the contemporary signs of the times manifested in today's human experience is our ecological crisis and the widespread sense of moral sensibility to safeguard our one and only Earth for the benefit of both present and future generations. From a faith perspective, the issue of environment is discussed from the three theological dimensions of creation, sin and redemption. The Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew II signed in Venice, on 10 June 2002, expresses the churches' deep concern for the plight of God's creation which is interpreted as a grave sin from a moral perspective.

The belief that the ecological issue is ultimately a moral problem was addressed by the Holy See's delegate in his speech at World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg. He explained that: "It must be recognized that juridical, economic and technical measures are not sufficient to solve the problem that hampers sustainable development. Many of these problems are issues of an ethical and moral nature, which call for a profound change in modern civilization's typical patterns of consumption and production, particularly in the industrialized countries." The Holy See's delegate made it clear that, in order to achieve this change, "we must encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' ... At stake, then, is not only a 'physical' ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the various living beings, but also a 'human ecology' which rests primarily on ensuring and safeguarding moral conditions in the actions of the human being in the human environment".

The same reflection was expressed by Pope John Paul II in his message for World Day of Peace in 1990: "The gravity of the ecological situation reveals how deep is the human moral crisis." He maintained that to recover health and harmony these broken relationships must be restored. The plight of the earth demonstrates that an individualistic materialism cannot be allowed to drive out responsibility and love, and that care for those in need, and respect for the rights of future generations, are necessary to sustain a proper life for all.

What is needed, therefore, is a conversion that would lead to new lifestyles in order to combat the consumerist culture. This has been clearly expressed in Seoul in 1990 by the World Council of Churches that called all Christians to embrace the cause of 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' and to work to achieve a sustainable way of life by a radical conversion of life styles. Many Christian churches, and people from other religious traditions, are now advocating this new attitude towards the environment. A case in point is the *Interfaith Declaration: A Code of Ethics for Business for Christians, Muslims and Jews* (1993) which is a genuine call to all followers of three monotheistic faiths to humanize the globalisation of business by 'good practices'. A way of life that disregards and damages God's creation, forces the poor into greater poverty, and threatens the right of future generations to a healthy environment and to their fair share of the earth's wealth and resources, is a sin because it is contrary to the vision of the gospel

#### 6. The Centrality of the Human Person

The social teaching of the Church has always stressed the centrality of the human person in economic activity. Inspired by this long-standing tradition, the Holy See's delegate at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, stated that: "Placing human well-being at the center of concern for the environment is actually the surest way of safeguarding creation. Taking into account that any sound and lasting agreement for achieving sustainable development must recognize and safeguard the dignity and rights of the human person, the continued promotion of the centrality of the human being in the discussion of sustainable development is a core interest of the Holy See and the main reason of its presence at this important summit. The promotion of human dignity is linked to the right to development and to the right to a healthy environment, since these rights highlight

the dynamics of the relationship of the individual towards self, towards others, towards creation, and ultimately toward God."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the Holy See's delegate at the Rio Earth Summit also addressed the centrality of the human person in issues of development and environment. He stated that while we all live in interdependence with the rest of creation, the human person is the only creature in the world "who is gifted with the intelligence to explore, the sagacity to utilize and is ultimately responsible for its choices and the consequences of those choices".<sup>13</sup> All persons are therefore called to a solidarity of universal dimensions that embraces all of creation, entrusted to the care of all. The Rio Declaration adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development had moreover recognised this, stating that "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature".

This basic ethical principle concerning the respect for the dignity and rights of the human person gives rise to the related concepts of stewardship and solidarity. Stewardship extends to all creation, while the universal destination of its goods includes not only natural resources but also those natural, spiritual, intellectual and technological goods necessary for the integral development of all persons and peoples.

In his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, *Peace with God. Peace with All Creation*, Pope John Paul II had emphasized the need for carefully coordinated solutions, based on a morally coherent world vision, to the environmental crisis. In this context, the role of the human person in protecting and renewing the environment remains central. While part of creation, human persons have a special place within the world. Not only do they use its resources; God entrusted it to their care. They must always keep in mind that they are part of creation and never set out to destroy it. Their special place within creation "lies in their being given a share in God's own concern and providence for the whole of creation".<sup>14</sup>

In considering the relationship of the human person to the preservation of the environment, three aspects of the nature of the human person must be taken into account. This person is an individual, a member of society, and a steward of creation. These three aspects situate the place of the human person within creation. First, the world is a gift of God the Creator, who is love, while the human person is a creature called to responsible stewardship. There is, however, an immense dignity to this stewardship which means that the person actually collaborates with God through his or her work and intelligence.

The second limit comes from God's destination of the goods of the earth for the good of all. Everyone without exception is invited to the table of creation, the goods of which either come directly from the hands of the Creator or are the result of human activity. When they are not equitably shared, it is above all the poor who suffer. This universal destination of created goods obviously calls into question any development model that harms the environment or does not favour the integral development of the poor sectors of society, and of the poor countries within the world community. It also requires taking very seriously the implications of the moral virtue of solidarity by which all are really responsible for the good of all. The richer nations are consuming an excessive amount of the goods of the earth. This calls not only for a profound change in their typical consumer lifestyle, but also legal guarantees concerning the responsible management of the earth's resources.

## 7. Creation as the 'Common Heritage of Mankind'

In his message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990, Pope John-Paul II addressed the ecological issue from the ethical perspective of the common heritage of mankind. It is noteworthy that the 1990 new year's message was the first papal pronouncement which literally contains all the key notions in Ambassador Pardo's famous 1967 motion at the

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, Message for the World day of Peace, No 10, 1 January 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Renato Martino, Intervention of the Holy See at the Rio Earth Summit, June 1992, Part I.

<sup>14</sup> Address on the World day of Youth, 14 August 1993, Colorado. Part I, No.2.

United Nations.<sup>15</sup> Although there are some allusions to the common heritage principle scattered throughout recent church documents, none of these references is so direct and comprehensive as that contained in Pope John Paul II's message for the 1990 World Day of Peace. In his statement of November 1967, Arvid Pardo suggested that the concept of the common heritage incorporates the following principles:

- 1) non-appropriation of those resources which belong to the common heritage; i.e. the right to use resources, but not to own them;
- 2) management of common resources on behalf of mankind (including future generations)
- 3) sharing of benefits by mankind as a whole, including by future generations
- 4) use of resources for peaceful purposes only.

In John-Paul II's message, the concept of the common heritage of mankind is the main ethical principle underlying the discussions about the responsible use of the earth's resources, the urgency of safeguarding the integrity and order of creation, and the need for fostering a new sense of intergenerational solidarity. The Pope clearly stated that "the earth is ultimately a *common heritage*, the fruit of which are *for the benefit of all*."<sup>16</sup> Thus, it is an unjust situation that a privileged few accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. John Paul II continued to argue that "the concepts of an ordered universe and a common heritage both point to the necessity of a more internationally coordinated approach to the *management of the earth's goods*."<sup>17</sup> The effects of ecological problems transcend national boundaries; hence their solution cannot be found solely on the national level. A supranational body is needed to regulate the use of the earth's resources.

Moreover, the Pope observed that "unfortunately, modern science already has the capacity to change the environment for hostile purposes."<sup>18</sup> In view of this, he stressed the urgent need of using the resources of the earth for peaceful purposes since "*peace with all creation is inseparable from peace among all people*."<sup>19</sup> The building up of a peaceful society is linked with respect for the integrity of creation. The papal message has also insisted that the ecological crisis cannot be tackled adequately without seriously considering the "future generations issue." Political and socio-economic decisions and planning must give attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us, "... namely, that there an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capacity of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the *well-being of future generations*."<sup>20</sup> Indiscriminate application of the advances in science and technology "has led to the painful realization that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the *well-being of future generations*."<sup>21</sup> Thus, the far-reaching effects of technology point to the urgent need of a deeper sense of responsibility for generations yet to be born.

The concept of the common heritage of mankind was introduced in international law in order to reconcile the human race and to put the law of solidarity and cooperation in place of the law of competition and self-interest. Undoubtedly, these are the objectives of the Pope's message which is inspired by the common heritage principle. John Paul II urged mankind to build a new sense of solidarity which offers "new opportunities for strengthening cooperation and peaceful relations among States."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the common heritage principle evolved in

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<sup>15</sup> In his motion, Arvid Pardo, who at that time was Malta's Ambassador, urged the United Nations to take action on the seabed issue and to pass a declaration that the seabed and the ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction are the common heritage of mankind. Cf. A. Pardo, "First Statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly, November 1, 1967", in *The Common Heritage. Selected Papers on Ocean and World Order: 1967-1974*, Malta, University of Malta Press, 1975, pp. 40-41.

<sup>16</sup> Pope John-Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation", in *Osservatore Romano*, 18-26 Dec 1989, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*.

order to correct the injustices resulting from the greed and selfish attitudes of the technologically powerful. The papal message urges the world community to abandon these attitudes and to share the resources of the earth with all mankind.

The import of the papal reference to the common heritage of mankind principle cannot be fully comprehended unless situating it in the church's traditional teaching on property. The concept of the common heritage is not a theory of property since heritage focuses the mind on receiving something from others in order to pass it on to someone else. It is, however, to the concept of property and ownership that is necessary to hark back in order to understand its Christian roots. Beyond doubt, the central and most fundamental idea implied in the common heritage principle is *mankind's right to use* all those resources of the earth which are considered as part of the common heritage. This concept affirms that all mankind, that is, both present and future generations, has the right *not* to be excluded from access to common resources. All other notions implied in the concept of common heritage are subsidiary to the fundamental right of usage. The ethical principles of sharing and of responsibility to future generations aim to safeguard the right of all mankind to use the earth's resources. The idea of management, though a very important element in the common heritage of mankind principle, is subordinated to the fundamental right to use the common resources. Resources should be administered on behalf of present and future generations in order to guarantee the right of all members of the human species to use the earth's resources. Moreover, the aim of regulating the use of common goods is to conserve the heritage and thus avoid infringing the right of future generations to make use of those resources which belong to all mankind. Thus, it is quite clear that all the characteristics implied in the common heritage of mankind principle converge on one basic tenet: the universal right to use the earth's common resources should be safeguarded because material goods belong to all mankind.

This central concept of the common heritage of mankind is one of the long-established principles of the Catholic social tradition. In the tradition of the church, there are two main tenets with reference to the resources of the world. The first is that by nature, *all* earthly resources have a universal destination, that is, they are intended for the good of mankind as a whole. The material goods of the earth are common to all men and they are destined for the use of all men. The earth is given as a gift from God for the nurture and fulfilment of all, not for the benefit of a few. This implies that everyone has an inherent right to use the resources of the earth. Since the right of usage is primary in character, it ranks among the fundamental rights of man. The concept of the common heritage of mankind was introduced in international law precisely in order to safeguard this fundamental human right.

The second is that some modes of appropriation are allowable and, in certain cases, required, to a limited extent. In the catholic social tradition, only within the context of the universal right to use the resources of the earth can the concept of the right to private property be developed. Property is seen as the institutional actualisation of man's fundamental right to use the material goods of the earth. Property should always be administered for the benefit of all. Though the right of property is important, the universal right to usage is prior to and conditions the right to private property. Since private property is a means to an end, it must always remain subordinate to its proper end, namely the universal right of usage.

#### 8. Universal Destination of Created Goods

The issue of business companies' social responsibility to integrate eco-efficiency in their management strategy and marketing cannot be fully comprehended unless situating it in the church's traditional doctrine on the universal destination of created things. This belief which underpins our ecological duties towards unborn generations can be traced back to the heritage of patristic social teaching. Strictly speaking, this teaching has biblical roots. In fact, the Bible reminds us that the earth is God's gift to all generations.<sup>1</sup> It is indeed remarkable that today's sense of global and intergenerational solidarity has already been developed extensively by the early Christian theologians.

Within the concept of the 'common good' we must also address another specific principle of Catholic social teaching, namely, "the universal destination of the goods of creation". Vatican

II (GS 69) states that "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus under the guidance of justice together with charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in an equitable manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adopted to the legitimate institutions of people, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal goal of earthly goods."

In the fourth century, the great bishop St Ambrose, citing the Gospel of Luke, wrote as follows:

If God's providence bestows an unending supply of food on the birds of the air who neither sow or reap, we ought to realise that the reason for people's supply running short is human greed. The fruits of the earth are given to feed all without distinction and nobody can claim any particular rights. Instead, we have lost the sense of the communion of goods, rushing to turn these goods (St Ambrose, *On the Gospel of St Luke*)

The right to private ownership, therefore, has strict limits, set in particular by the urgent need of others. The environment is a prime example of a good that is essentially shared, and is not to be monopolized by powerful individuals and groups.

In the tradition of the church, there are two main tenets with reference to the resources of the world. The first is that by nature, *all* earthly resources have a universal destination, that is, they are intended for the good of humankind as a whole.<sup>ii</sup> God has given the fruits of the earth to sustain the entire human family, without excluding or favouring anyone. Since material goods of the earth are a common patrimony of all humankind, both present and future generations have the right not to be excluded from access to the earth's resources. The earth is given as a gift from God for the nurture and fulfilment of all, not for the benefit of a few or to one particular generation. This implies that everyone has an inherent right to use the resources of the earth. Since the right of usage is primary in character, it ranks among fundamental human rights.

The second is that some modes of appropriation are allowable and, in certain cases, required, to a limited extent. Since patristic times, the concept of the right to private property was discussed within the context of the universal right to use the resources of the earth. Property is seen as the institutional actualization of man's fundamental right to use the material goods of the earth. Property should always be administered for the benefit of all. Though the right of property is important, the universal right to usage is prior to and conditions the right to private property. Since private property is a means to an end, it must always remain subordinate to its proper end, namely the universal right of usage.

According to the social teachings of the Fathers, ownership of material goods is not possession but stewardship. All creation is made available by God to all humankind and the rich are essentially its stewards. Those who have should imitate God's beneficence and generosity in sharing their material goods with others. It is only due to sin and greed that earthly goods have drawn into the present oppressive state of affairs in which there are such differences between the rich and the poor.<sup>iii</sup> The early Fathers of the church harshly attacked the idea of ownership as an exclusive and unlimited right of disposing of material goods. They attempted to develop an ethical perspective which aimed to safeguard those who were being deprived of their fundamental right to use the resources of the earth.

In one of his homilies, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-216) proposes two guiding principles for the use and possession of earthly goods: *autarkeia* and *koinonia*. The first ethical principle, namely *autarkeia*, suggests that every possession is for the sake of self-sufficiency. *Autarkeia* denotes a standard of living that enables one to live a life consonant with human dignity. Beyond the limits of *autarkeia*, the holding of goods makes no sense in the patristic view. But the purpose of possessing earthly goods is also to attain *koinonia*, the equal fellowship that abolishes the differentiation between the few rich who live in luxury and the "many who labour in poverty". According to Clement of Alexandria, the ethical principle of *koinonia* should remind Christians of everyone's right to share or participate in earthly goods:

It is God himself who has brought our race to a *koinonia*, by sharing Himself, first of all, and by sending His Word (Logos) to all alike, and by making all things for all. Therefore everything is in common, and the rich should not grasp a greater share. The expression, then, "I own something and I have more than enough; why should I not enjoy it?" is not worthy of a human nor does it indicate any community feeling. The other expression does, however: "I have something, why should I not share it with those in need?" Such a one is perfect, and fulfils the command: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>iv</sup>

In the context of the theme discussed in this paper, the patristic ethical principles could be interpreted as follows: since the world economy depends on a base of natural resources that is being severely degraded, reducing consumption and waste creates new opportunities for business to grow through the innovation of less wasteful process and with life-enhancing goods and services. Future markets need to favour business that partner with government and civil society groups to serve basic needs, enhance human skills, increase economic capacity, and help remedy inequalities.

One of the most important texts on social matters written of Cyprian (c. 200-258), bishop of Cartage, is *On Works and Almsgiving*. Cyprian wrote: "For whatever belongs to God, is for the common use of all, nor is anyone excluded from his benefits and gifts, nor is the human race prevented from equally enjoying God's goodness and generosity."<sup>v</sup> Another early Christian Father who affirmed that God entrusted the earth to all humanity was Lactantius (250-317) who was called "the Christian Cicero" on account of the elegance of his style. In his writing on *The Divine Institutes* we find that "... God has given the land for the common use of all men, so that all may enjoy the goods it produces in common, and not in order that some with grasping and raging greed may claim everything for himself, while another may be deprived of the things the earth produces for all."<sup>vi</sup>

Moreover, Ambrose (c. 337-397), bishop of Milan, wrote that "God has ordered all things to be produced, so that there should be food in common for all, and that the earth should be a kind of common possession for all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right to all, but greed has made it a right for a few."<sup>vii</sup> Ambrose insisted that all things of the earth are created for the use of all human beings. All human beings have a natural right to make use of them. The right to private property is not unconditional, exclusive and absolute, but essentially limited. There is a strict duty of justice, and not merely of charity, to share these goods with others. In his writing *On Naboth*, Ambrose commented as follows:

When giving to the poor you are not giving him what is yours; rather you are paying back to him what is his. Indeed what is common to all and has been giving to all to make use of, you have usurped for yourself alone. The earth belongs to all, and not only the rich.<sup>viii</sup>

In one of his writings, Ambrose referred also to "injuries done to nature." What are these "injuries" of which Ambrose spoke about? He said that a few rich are trying to keep the earth for themselves so that, in consequence, "few are they who do not use what belongs to all than those who do."

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) had also insisted that God created the earth for the common use and benefit of all humankind so that all should receive from it what they require. Everyone has therefore an equal right to use the resources of the earth. He explained the universal destination of the earth's resources as follows:

Mark the wise dispensation of God ... He has made certain things common, such as the sun, air, earth, and the water, the sky and the sea ... Their benefits are dispensed equally to all brethren ... And mark, that concerning things that remain in common there is no contention but all is peaceable. But when one attempts to possess himself of anything, to make it his own, then contention is introduced, as if nature herself were indignant.<sup>ix</sup>

## 9. A "Guardian" for Future Generations

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We, as human species, hold the natural and cultural environment of our planet in common, both with other members of the present generation and with other generations, past and present. At any given time, each generation is both a custodian or trustee of the planet for future generations and a beneficiary of its fruits. This imposes obligations upon us to care for the planet and at the same time gives us certain rights to use it.

Our responsibilities towards future generations have already been endorsed in many national and international declarations, treaties and resolutions. However, recognition of our responsibilities to far-distant unborn generations alone is not enough! There must be an implementation of this principle. Time is now ripe enough to translate words into concrete actions. The appointment of a "Guardian" to alert the international community of the threats to the well-being of future generations would be the most appropriate step in the right direction to safeguard the quality of future life<sup>23</sup>.

It is a long-established tradition in almost all civilised societies of the world that persons who are declared legally incompetent, such as minors and the mentally infirm, are protected by a set of institutions from those who might either advertently or inadvertently exploit their disadvantage. For instance, some other individual or group is charged with the responsibility of acting as proxy, or an advocate, on behalf of the person whose ability to represent his or her own interests is non-existent or impaired.

In this respect future generations are similar to those that our society has declared legally incompetent. The same consideration that presently supports proxies for the incompetent among our contemporary also gives credence to the idea of a proxy for future generations where contemplated policies could impose substantial long-term risks.

The authorised person or an organ ("Guardian") appointed to represent future generations at various international fora, particularly the U.N., would be entitled:

- to appear before institutions whose decisions could significantly affect the future of the species to argue the case on their behalf, hence bringing out the long-term implications of proposed action and presenting alternatives. His role would not be to decide, but to promote enlightened decisions. Thus, the Guardian would have the power of advocacy, to plead for future generations. He would only have the right to put forward arguments on behalf of future generations.
- to introduce a new dimension - that of the *time* horizon - into the resolution of issues traditionally confined to the here and now. The greatest danger to future generations is that living resources essential for human survival and sustainable development are increasingly being destroyed and depleted. Future generations are seriously threatened to inherit a poor quality of life. The Guardian would face the burden of opposing the firmly established attitude of our civilization in discounting the future.

Now it is time to appoint a Guardian for future generations to be protected from the adverse impact of term-term decisions in business. Regional and international organisations involved directly in the business sector could take the role of a Guardian to speak on behalf of the interests of far-distant unborn generations. For instance, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development or the World Business Academy could take this important role.

The appointment of a Guardian among the business community would be a true achievement for the interests of those generations yet to be born!

#### 10. Globalisation in Solidarity

The social teaching of the church addresses the question of globalisation and its effects on the unity of the human family within the context of its reflections on development. The church is concerned about inequalities and the exclusion of individuals and people from economic and social progress. Pope John Paul II addresses, for example, the question of

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<sup>23</sup> Agius, E., (ed), *Future Generations and International Law*, London, Earthscan, 1998.

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monopolies and unfair competition, not in terms of market functioning, but in terms of the inclusion of the poorest: "It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development". (CA, 35)

For Pope John Paul II, for example, the challenge for Catholic social teaching, "is to ensure a globalisation in solidarity, a globalisation without marginalisation" (Message for the World Day of Peace, 1998, no 3). The stress of the social teachings is, one might say, on how to tame, domesticate, manage or govern the processes of globalisation, in order that they may effectively create a more inclusive and more equitable development process.

Pope Paul VI had already dealt with this social issue in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* which insists that the answer to the contemporary social question is to be found in a new vision of integral development, which "fosters each man and the whole man" (PP, 14), that is, every dimension of the person's life and persons as found anywhere in the world. Pope Paul VI stressed that economic activity must be situated within a wider context of authentic and integral human development, especially if it is to be effective in this new world-wide context. He notes that "the development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone" (PP 14) and indicates some elements of the political context which must be considered: "If authentic economic order is to be established on a world-wide basis, an end will have to be put to profiteering, to national ambitions, to the appetite for political supremacy, to militaristic calculations and to machinations for the sake of spreading and imposing ideologies" (PP 18).

This broad context within which economic globalisation must be examined is taken up within specific references to modern globalization in, for example *Ecclaeisia in America* n.20, published after the Special Session of the Synod of Bishops for America, North and South. The Pope notes that:

The ethical implications of globalization can be positive or negative. There is an economic globalization which brings some positive consequences, such as efficiency and increased production and which, with the development of economic links between different countries, can help to bring greater unity among peoples and make possible a better service to the human family. However if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative.

And the Pope goes on to indicate some of these possible negative consequences:

absolutizing the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority.

The concept of "absolutizing the economy" is particularly significant for our reflections on the social implications of globalization in the business sector. Social progress cannot be achieved without sustainable economic growth. Today, however, it is more and more evident also that sustained economic growth on its own will not necessarily achieve social progress, that is growth with equity and inclusions. In fact, any "new global economic and fanatical architecture" requires a "new development architecture" and a "new political architecture". Trade and financial liberalization can only take place within a global democratic political framework which safeguards non-economic elements of the global common good, such as the environment. The social goals of the international community cannot be determined only by the technical economics decisions of international financial institutions or by decisions heavily influenced by the domestic interests of a group of the stronger economics.

Pope John Paul has addressed the concept of "absolutizing the economy" in various ways in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

If economic life in absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society's only value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimensions has been weakened and ends up limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone. .. Economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous,

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when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a subject, who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him. (CA 39)

The Pope affirms that absolutizing the economy leads to a situation in which "people lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose, since life has a unique value that the State and the market must serve" (CA 49).

#### Concluding Remarks

The drive for open markets and for the economic growth needed for the fight against poverty and in favour of human development should be combined with strong environmental concern. Economic growth, in any part of the world, is not incompatible with the enhancement of an environment which is clean, healthy and is able to reflect the beauty given to it by its creator. Indeed, it is now clear to all, including the business world, that globalisation will be sustainable in the long term, only in the manner in which it equitably integrates social and environmental concerns.

A renewed sense of global responsibility must, of course, also be accompanied by measures which ensure that widely accepted fundamental norms concerning the environment and the protection of human health are adopted, respected and enforced. There should be no impunity for individuals and corporate criminal behaviour which seriously damages human health or the environment.

The international community needs more business leaders who are accountable for their companies' reputation, who act as role models, and who provide the value-based leadership in business management and marketing. Without embedding values in the business sector, without building and maintaining eco-efficiency, present and future generations will be deprived from their right to enjoy a sustainable and healthy environment!

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 1:1-31; 17:7-8: "I will maintain my Covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I give the land you sojourn in to you and to your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession. I will be your God."

<sup>ii</sup> It is interesting to note that the Koran also announces to all mankind that "all wealth, all things, belong to God" and thus to all members of the human community.

<sup>iii</sup> E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. I, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1960, p. 116.

<sup>iv</sup> As quoted by C. Avila, *Ownership. Early Christian Teaching*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1983, p. 37.

<sup>v</sup> CCL 111 a.71. (as quoted by P. Phan, *Social Thought. Messages of the Church*, vol. 20, Wilmington, Delaware, 1984, p. 91).

<sup>vi</sup> CSEL 19.414 (as quoted by P. Phan. *op.cit.*, p. 95.)

<sup>vii</sup> *De Off.* 1, 132.

<sup>viii</sup> CSEL 32.2.498 (as quoted by P. Phan., *op.cit.*, p.173).

<sup>ix</sup> *Commentary on St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy*. Quoted by C. Avila, *op.cit.*, p. 95.