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Sustainable Development

By Riccardo Cascioli

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FOREWORD

The most complex environmental problems facing the world will be solved by people, if they are to be solved at all. People alive today or people living in a generation to come will address energy, deforestation, climate change, endangered wildlife, and a myriad of other concerns. That is to say that the human person is the best hope for a better, greener world tomorrow.

The human person is also at the center of economic development, the purpose of which is rightly oriented toward improving the quality and dignity of human life. This fact has been hotly contested in UN debates about "sustainable development" since the term was first applied to the human race more than two decades ago. The term was initiated by those who viewed human development in opposition to ecological preservation and who therefore endorsed controlling and reducing human numbers. Over time, sustainable development has evolved to encompass a more balanced view acknowledging that while economic development often leads to environmental degradation, the solution to the problem involves responsible stewardship along with human progress, not curtailing the number of lives to be improved.

And yet as UN member states approach Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, it is important for delegates, scholars, and concerned citizens to grasp these underlying ideas and concepts that inform the debates about sustainable development. Riccardo Cascioli has made this task attainable in this timely white paper. Cascioli cuts to the core of the debate by illuminating the most contentious issues such as the population agenda behind the Bruntland Commission and various UN conferences on the subject, and fundamental problems presented by concepts such as "sustainable development," "carrying capacity," and "ecological footprint."

Several signs seem to be harbingers of a return to the "anti-people" mindset Riccardo Cascioli uncovers. Experts have begun to speak openly once again about the need for population control. When the United Nations announced that the world's population had reached 7 billion people in October 2011, some warned us that the planet could not accommodate us all. Environmental groups have begun to forge links with population groups, af-

ter decades of aversion to the controversial population agenda. Nations have demanded "carbon credits" during international climate talks in exchange for eliminating millions of future citizens through coercive population control programs.

All of these suggest a regressive mindset that is out of step with progress nations have made in the understanding of population and development and human rights. The negotiators at the Earth Summit in 1992 did not take account of what is now widely recognized as the most important news about population and development. According to the UN Population Division, the world is facing a crisis of global aging that is "unprecedented," "pervasive," "profound," and "irreversible." The cause, UN statisticians have found, is global fertility decline: there are not enough children to support previous generations who are living longer. Aging is already having significant adverse effects on developed and developing nations and the effects are expected to become more severe in the decades ahead.

Another development has been an increased emphasis on economic, social, and cultural rights. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7 includes targets for increasing the proportion of the population using an improved drinking water source and sanitation facilities, and reducing the proportion of slum dwellers in the population. A human rights approach does not jibe with the view that improving these proportions requires reducing the poor's progeny, but rather that all children, no matter their circumstances, have equal rights to adequate standards of living.

In his report to delegates preparing for Rio+20, the UN Secretary General called for "bottom up" and social solutions and not just "top down," technological solutions to the challenges of sustainable development. With this thoughtful paper, Riccardo Cascioli reminds us that if we are to succeed in this endeavor, such social solutions must put the human person at the center of sustainable development.

Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D.
Director
International Organizations Research Group

Introduction

The term "sustainable development" has become commonplace on a global level. At present, there is no area of human activity, nor geographical location so isolated, that it is not judged by global standards of sustainability. Everything must be sustainable. Today we talk in terms of sustainable industry, sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, sustainable mobility, and even sustainable peace. No one is overlooked; the United Nations (UN) Commission on Sustainable Development goes so far as to have an office for "Small Developing Island States," that is, those microstates concentrated mostly in the Pacific Ocean, small atolls with fewer than a thousand inhabitants.

We are not just dealing with the geographic expansion of the concept, but also the ontological expansion... susceptible to becoming a formidable instrument of oppression.

We are not just dealing with the geographic expansion of the concept, but also the ontological expansion: people speak more and more often about "sustainable human development." On official levels, this expression is justified as a desire to place human interests at the center of politics.[1] In reality it is understood and argued as necessary of all human activity — individual and social — to be "sustainable." Sustainable development is therefore a broad concept susceptible to becoming, in the hands of a powerful world government or superpower, a formidable instrument of oppression. All the more so because — as this paper argues — the generic and vague use of the term "sustainable" allows for highly discretionary interpretations.

1 *See* for example the United Nations Development Program's global and regional reports at http://www.undp.org.

Evolution of the Biological Term

The adoption of the term "sustainable" and its application to human activity did not happen by chance. This adaptation is a classic example of translating scientific theory from the biological world to the human world, which is typical of a culture centered on Social Darwinism, an ideology that tends to deny the uniqueness of the human species in comparison with other animal species. Social Darwinism has, moreover, found full application in the *Earth Charter* project — born at the UN and promulgated in 2000 — which, in the promoters' intentions,[2] would replace the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to create a new international ethical code. In the *Earth Charter*, the centrality and uniqueness of the human person vanishes in order to make room for a more generic "community of life," in which man is considered on the same level as animals and vegetation.

The biological origins of "sustainability" is found as early as the 1950's in, for example, theories designed for the fishing industry regarding *sustainable yield.* An important development in this theory was made in 1954 by Milner Schaefer of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography with a hypothesis that linked the dynamics of the fish population with the quantity of fish. The hypothesis is based on suppositions that the size of the population of fish determines its rate of growth; and more precisely, the growth rate is decreased when the population is reduced. However, growth rate is also reduced when the population approaches the limits of its *carrying capacity* (the capacity of sustainability), which is caused by food scarcity. Thus comes the idea that it is necessary to maintain the population of fish at an intermediate level so as to optimize the quantity of the fish caught, which is expressed as the relative definition "the maximum ecologically sustainable yield."[3]

Consequently this concept, originally intended for codfish and sole,

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2 Among it promoters are Maurice Strong, former director of the United Nations Environment Program and founder as well as president emeritus of *Earth Council Alliance*, and Mikhail Gorbachev, former president of the Soviet Union and current president of Green Cross International.

3 Richard W. Zabel, Chris J. Harvey, Steven L. Katz, Thomas P. Good, Philip S. Levin, *Ecologically Sustainable Yield*, American Scientist March-April 2003, pp. 153.

was eventually applied to the human species. The first noted attempt was at the beginning of the 1970s; it is not a coincidence that same period gave rise to the international environmental movement and its union with the birth control movement. Indeed, we must remember that Earth Day, celebrated for the first time on April 22, 1970, made this "alliance" official and from then the motto became: "Population Pollutes."[4]

Nonetheless, still in vague terms, sustainable development began to be spoken of for the first time, still in vagye terms, at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, introducing the principle according to which development and environmental protection must keep pace. It was 1972, the same year in which the Club of Rome[5] published its report *I limiti dello sviluppo*[6] (*The Limits of Development*), which identified four lethal dangers for humanity: population explosion, scarcity of food, scarcity of resources, and the energy crisis. The report predicted that within a hundred years, humanity would reach the natural limits of development, from which, if there were not an immediate intervention through targeted policies, humanity would suffer a sudden and catastrophic decline. If the principle of sustainable development remained underdeveloped, the cultural ground would be prepared for this catastrophe to take place. *The Limits of Development* had a spectacular success, selling 12 million copies in 27 international editions in just a few months as well as making a great impact on public opinion and the scientific community.

This concept, originally intended for codfish and sole, was eventually applied to the human species.

To understand the success of such a report, one must also remember that the beginning of the 1970s marked an unexpected food crisis, followed by nearly a decade of drought that caused severe famine in the regions of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad, and also hit India heavily (from 1960–61 to 1967–68, the population under the poverty

4 Jacqueline Kasun, *Population and Environment*, Population Research Institute 1991, pp.6–7.

5 Founded in 1968 by Aurelio Peccei, together with Premi Nobel, political leaders and intellectuals, the Club of Rome intends to be a sort of cenacle of thinkers dedicated to analyzing the changes of contemporary society. The name was born from the fact that the first meeting took place in Rome, occupying the head office of the Accademia dei Lincei alla Farnesina. At present the co-presidents of the Club, which keeps its head office in Hamburg (Germany), are Dr. Ashok Khosla of India and Dr. Eberhard von Koerber of Germany.

6 AA.VV., *I limiti dello sviluppo*, Mondadori 1972.

threshold grew from 52% to a total of 70%). The year 1972 recorded a decrease of the world's grain production down to 33 million tons, the grain reserves of exporting countries suddenly dropped from 49 million tons (1971–72) to 29 (1972–73), while in the same period demand grew from 52 to 68 million tons of grain. To worsen the situation, there was the 1973 oil shock that, together with the sharp rise in fuel costs, further contributed to increased agricultural prices (which likewise quadrupled in a space of 18 months, between 1972 and 1974).

Nevertheless, by the mid 1970's — through a series of events that cannot be fully elaborated in this study — the food situation had decidedly changed in such a way that since then such a famine has not been recorded and the world population that lives under the poverty threshold has been significantly reduced. One can simply consult the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)[7] statistics to verify that from 1970 until today, the availability of food per capita has undeniably grown in all of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa, despite, the population nearly doubling from little more than 3.5 billion in 1970 to the current 6.3 billion. Data confirming that can be found in the UN's *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* that states, "Robust growth in the first half of the decade reduced the number of people in developing regions living on less than $1.25 a day from 1.8 billion in 1990 to 1.4 billion in 2005, while the poverty rate dropped from 46 percent to 27 percent." This is in spite of the fact that in that in the meantime the population has grown by about one billion persons.[8] In percentage terms the progress is even more evident, "the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from nearly a third to 19 per cent over this period." The recent food crisis of 2008–2009, which is closer in memory than that of the 1970s, appears to be a conditional incident incapable of substantially altering the trends. In spite of all that, the "limits of development" movement continues.

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7 Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations http://www.fao.org/faostat/foodsecurity/MDG1_en.htm

8 Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, pg. 8. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/

The Brundtland Commission

The benefits of the events in the 1970s were reaped some years later by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission, named after the Norwegian ex-premier who presided over it), to which is attributed the cause and precise definition of sustainable development. The Commission was instituted in 1983 by then UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, who invited Madam Gro Harlem Brundtland to preside over it. Brundtland was head of the Labor opposition in Norway and then much later a great protagonist of UN international conferences. Her participation in UN conferences led Brundtland to be nominated director general of the World Health Organization in 1998, a position she concluded in 2003. She currently serves as a special envoy on climate change for the UN Secretary-General.[9]

The Brundtland Commission concluded its work in 1987 with the drafting of a voluminous report entitled "Our Common Future."[10] Besides calling for the assembly of an international conference on environment and development and the promulgation of an *Earth Charter* — the report globally launched the concept of "sustainable development," which was defined as, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The declaration might appear as common sense, which is probably the reason for its success. At first glance there is little that seems objectionable, were it not for the real underlying goals for which it was accepted. In fact, "the greatest merit" of the Brundtland Commission was considered, "giving a comprehensive vision of the existing connection between population,

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9 Ms. Brundtland, who had previously participated in the International Commission on Disarmament and Security (known as the Palme Commission), had already served as the Prime Minister of Norway for ten months in 1981. She reassumed the office of Prime Minister in 1986 and served for exactly ten years. Between 1974 and 1979, Brundtland had held the office of Norwegian Minister for Environmental Affairs; however, in Norway she had acquired fame primarily for her battle to legalize abortion, which became effective in 1976. Brundtland also heavily advocated this theme in her work for the United Nations.

10 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

environment and development."[11] In other words, its merit lies in pointing out that population growth was responsible for underdevelopment and damaging the environment. What was previously enacted for codfish and sole was now being applied to human beings; political demographics — that is, control of fertility rates — was to become central for resolving not only global problems like development and the environment, but also health and education.

It suffices to read this passage of the chapter "Population and Human Resources" in the Brundtland Report:

> Every year the number of human beings increases, but the amount of natural resources with which to sustain this population, to improve the quality of human lives, and to eliminate mass poverty remains finite. Present rates of population growth cannot continue. They already compromise many governments' abilities to provide education, health care and food security for people, much less their abilities to raise living standards. This gap between numbers and resources is all the more compelling because so much of the population growth is concentrated in low-income countries and ecologically disadvantaged regions.[12]

Then the report laments that until now, birth control policies have been "isolated from other programs that reduce fertility and even from those that increase motivation to use such [family planning] services." Hence the report demands the integration of family planning services in policies for health, education, development and the environment claiming, "This integration increases motivation [...] and raises the effectiveness of investments in birth control."[13]

As a consequence, from this point onward the international battles to legalize abortion, and also euthanasia, entered fully accredited into the policies of sustainable development, with the ideological (and legal) paradox that in the name of the right to life of "future generations," the right to life of present generations must be limited. It is not unwarranted

11 Stanley P. Johnson, *World Population – Turning the Tide.*, Graham & Trotman, London-Boston 1994, p. 6.

12 Our Common Future, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

13 Stanley P. Johnson, *World Population – Turning the Tide.*, Graham & Trotman, London-Boston 1994, p. 197.

then that the Holy See always demonstrated evident distrust while dealing with the concept of sustainable development. In a document released by the Pontifical Council for the Family in 1994, which will be reviewed in more depth later, sustainable development was shown in a harsh light and treated as a form of neocolonialism, given that, "The developed countries define for other countries what must be, from their point of view, 'sustainable development.'"[14]

Moreover, we can also affirm that the principle of population control, in particular, paves the way for eugenics. If the population must be decreased, it automatically begs the question of who will survive. The answer is obvious: the survivors will be selected so as to improve the human race. The modern "quality of life" principle also plays a part in this; once life falls below a certain standard, it loses value. By these same measures, birth control in poor countries along with artificial insemination and cloning in rich countries are faces of the same coin.

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14 Pontifical Council for the Family, *Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1994, no. 24.

Carrying Capacity *versus* Reality

The question of *carrying capacity* merits a deeper understanding since it is the key term in comprehending sustainable development,[15] and also justifies the goal of reducing the world population by as many as two billion persons.[16] As with the origins of the sustainability concept, *carrying capacity* was originally constituted to explain animal behavior. In ecology it is basically defined as "the number of individuals in a population that can be sustained by a habitat's resources." Introducing the concept of sustainable development in policy-making signaled its conversion from the biological to the human world, and its application to development and the environment.

Introducing the concept of sustainable development in policy-making signaled its conversion from the biological to the human world, and its application in regards to development and to the environment.

The *carrying capacity* theory has one insurmountable limitation; reality negates its validity. As far as development is concerned, for example, the equation "overpopulation equals poverty" has not been demonstrated at all. Of the 21 poorest countries in the world, only 7 have a population density higher than 100 inhabitants per sq km, whereas among the 21 richest countries, 12 countries well surpass this figure. For example, in the classification of more developed countries, we find countries with high-density populations like Japan (338 inhabitants/sq km), Taiwan (597/sq km), Italy (195/sq km), United Kingdom (248/sq km), and Germany (232/

15 *See* the Encyclopedia of Sustainable Development, compiled by the Manchester Metropolitan University with the support of the British government. http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/esd/menu.html

16 The biologist Paul Ehrlich, celebrated for the book *The Population Bomb* (1968), claimed to scientifically base his thesis on the maximum population of 2 billion that the Earth would be in a position to sustain, cfr. Paul and Anne Ehrilich, *One with Nineveh: Politics, Consumption, and the Human Future*, Shearwater Books, 2005.

sq km). Among the poorest we find many countries with low population densities: Eritrea (38 inhabitants/sq km), Liberia (31/sq km), Guinea Bissau (44/sq km), and Nicaragua (42/sq km).

If we examine the countries that have suffered from famine in recent years, we find, for example, that the 20 million inhabitants of the Sahel region are scattered in 6 countries with an average density that does not surpass 4 inhabitants per sq km. Furthermore, of the 5 African countries hit by famine in 1991 (Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique and Liberia), the most populated is Ethiopia with a density of 72 inhabitants per sq km, which is twice or even four times more populated than the other countries involved.

However, the experience of developed countries can also be of help in this study. In the developed world, the fertility decline was successful in achieving a consistent rate of development. If, instead, we examine native Africa (the only region of the world where a negative economic growth is recorded), we see that a lack of economic development is essentially due to political and economic motives, rather than cultural. For example, on average that region continues to spend on armaments double the amount they invest in agriculture and industry. For a continent subject to drought, it is clear that lack of investment in irrigation and agricultural development constitutes as suicide.

The same applies to the environment; the worst environmental problems are created in underdeveloped countries that are also the least intensely populated. On the other hand, economic development brings with it attention to the environment. It is a fact that London today is not only much less polluted than 40 years ago, when the smog of the British capital killed thousands of persons, but that it is also much less polluted in comparison to how it was in 1585. In the United States pollutant emissions came down by 62% from 1957, sulfur trioxide was down by 80% and nitric oxide by 38% from 1975.[17] This does not imply that there cannot, nor should not be more done for the environment, but it is evident that the problem does not rest in population, but rather in underdevelopment. The fact is that the 15 most polluted cities of the world are found in still developing countries, 13 of which are in Asia. New Delhi and Mexico City are on average eight times more polluted than any western metropolis. There is a logic to this; history demonstrates that during the first phase of a society's economic growth pollution likewise increases, but history

17 Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 163.

also shows that pollution tends to diminish drastically when the growth reaches the capacity to free resources for investment in maintaining the environment. Therefore, the answer to environmental problems is in accelerating the processes of development, not in controlling birth rates.

Despite the best scientific calculations, no one is in a position to say irrefutably what exact number of inhabitants would result in the planet's equilibrium. *Carrying capacity*, therefore, reveals itself as merely an ideological concept, and the reason why present reality denies its application rests in its origin. In fact, "sustaining capacity," as already stated, is a definition introduced while describing the means by which an animal population grows or is reduced. It has been applied to human beings by many "catastrophists" who insist the population will grow so long as resources are abundant, until it reaches a crisis that will cause the starvation and death of an enormous number of people. This model, however, denies an obvious reality, that the human species is profoundly — and ontologically — diverse from all the other animal species. Humanity is capable of judging and adapting to eventual changes or modifying the environment, abilities that are unknown to animals. Fish know nothing of agriculture, and are incapable of cultivating their own food or increasing and diversifying their supply of resources, they are, rather, at the mercy of nature. Moreover, the error of applying *carrying capacity* to human reality is also demonstrated by another aspect: if such an approach were accurate, the fertility rates would indeed be much higher in developed countries, where there is abundance of food, in comparison to less developed countries. Instead it is the exact opposite.

In the last few years, to support the overpopulation theory and to justify interventions to control births, the concept of *caring capacity* — or the ability to care — was also added. The Population Council, one of the major anti-birth centers of thought, has primarily interpreted *caring capacity* as "the human capacity to improve well-being and reduce poverty."[18] The Population Council, a powerful and influential lobbying institution created in 1952 by John D. Rockefeller III, singles out three components critically linked to *caring capacity*: global availability of resources, institutional capacity (both national and local), and social well-being. As one can easily perceive, the last two are essentially flexible ideological concepts and impossible to measure objectively.

However, it is fundamental to consider the first component, i.e.

18 Population Council, *Population Growth and Our Caring Capacity*, December 2003, p. 1.

resources, because it is the central issue of the population problem and thus sustainable development. According to the advocates of sustainability, the world's resources should be nearly exhausted because of the current pressure of the population. Such theses presuppose that the world's resources have a fixed expiration date, absolute and known, or "defined" to use the words of the Brundtland Commission. But none of these things is true. No one knows concretely, for example, how much oil even exists under the terrestrial crust, and the same is true for all of the other natural resources. What is known and speculated is always less than what exists in reality.

Demand is the sole driver in the search for alternative resources. Gas, a clean and low-cost source of energy, is an example. Gas production has grown 12 times since the end of the Second World War. In 1950 it represented 10% of global energy; today it represents 23%. Also, with the growth of production reserves have correspondingly multiplied. In 1973 there were gas reserves available for 47 years, in 1999 there was gas for the next 60 years. History demonstrates that prime material resources are searched out and discovered only in answer to demand. For example, the 40 thousand tons of lead available in 1950 were sufficient for the population of that time. Producing more would have been economically counterproductive because it would have collapsed prices to the harm of those producers. But with the growth of demand, 20 years later there was no problem reaching a production level of 86 thousand tons.

Moreover, throughout history resources are continuously increasing and diversifying. It is sufficient to think about the significance of the introduction of potatoes in agriculture. Yet, the same thing applies for carbon, petrol, fertilizers, atomic energy, and all resources that man has recognized and exploited by progressing and using new technologies. Two centuries ago oil was unknown, but having oil is useless if one does not have the technology to extract, refine, and distribute it. The same analogy can be made for water. Today virtually no one in the developed world quenches his or her thirst with water coming directly

The concept of resource is not limited by nature — as "sustainable development" ideology would have it — but by human creativity and technology that renders a specific component of nature exploitable.

from its natural source. Instead, technology permits drinking water that in nature would not be drinkable, along with the construction of aqueducts that carry water directly into houses. One can easily assume that in the next few decades we will have resources at our disposition that today we cannot even imagine.

This leads to one powerful conclusion; the concept of resource is not limited by nature — as "sustainable development" ideology would have it — but by human creativity and technology that renders a specific component of nature exploitable. The first and fundamental resource is therefore man, with his capacity to adapt and respond to changing demands. Because of this, the famous American economist Julian Simon has reached the conclusion that resources are unlimited in the sense that humans will never leave themselves wanting, for whatever aim a resource is used.[19] As an example Simon uses copper, which for thousand of years has been available for an infinite number of uses, and still copper consumption has notably grown in the last millennium. Yet, products made with copper cost less today in comparison to any other period of history. This would not make sense if it were true that the more a natural resource is used, then the scarcer and more costly it becomes. But, says Simon, when the price of copper increased because of its scarcity, men sought new mines of copper, found ways to recycle what was already available, and developed alternatives to copper.

If man is the principle resource, then the true threat to the planet's future rests in the massive deployment of economic and human resources to block the phantom catastrophe supposedly caused by excessive population. In effect, it gives a mistaken answer to a problem that does not exist.

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19 Julian Simon's thesis on the relationship between population and resources is found in the book *The Ultimate Resource 2*, Princeton University Press, edition updated July 1998.

United Nations International Conferences

In spite of its evident theoretical errors, the Brundtland Commission's report is at the heart of all the successive development declarations and action plans approved by the UN International Conferences. Starting with the Amsterdam Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development (a forum on population in the XXI century) of 1989 that did three things: 1) recommended national demography programs, calling for "a reduction of the average number of children per woman in order to achieve, at minimum, the average projection for the population calculated by the United Nations"; 2) clearly indicated the priorities of such programs should be, "a growth in the use of contraceptives in countries on the road to development, so as to reach at least 56% of women in reproductive age by 2000"; and 3) established the necessary investment to realize such programs, pricing it at 9 billion dollars a year, double of which was spent, until then, on the politics of population control.[20]

Exactly as the Brundtland Commission had hoped, after this declaration followed a series of UN Conferences that began with the Summit on Environment and Development that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At the Sustainable Development Summit held in Johannesburg, September 2002, the latest document developed by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development reaffirmed that "the poorest countries of the world have a tendency to have the highest rates of growth of population, a thing that undermines their efforts to invest in human development, reduce poverty and promote sustainable development."[21]

Further consideration is due the international UN conferences, occurring one after another between 1992 and 1996, which confronted diverse questions linked to development and supplied the foundation

20 Pontifical Council for the Family, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

21 Commission on Sustainable Development, *Demographic dynamics and sustainability*, March 15, 2001, no. 5.

for successive global policies. Beginning, as mentioned before, with the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro 1992), it was then followed by the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995), World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul 1995), and World Food Conference (Rome 1996). This conference cycle represents a novelty, since for the first time all the governments of the countries present at the UN were represented in an official manner, and the conclusion of each conference resulted in a solemn commitment by the governments to the declared objectives. If, up until the Summit of Rio de Janeiro the codification and diffusion of the sustainable development concept was the work of a restricted intellectual elite, with this summit it was taken on by the international political community, which legitimized it in Agenda 21 (with reference to the 21st century), that is, the Plan of Action adopted by the heads of State and attending government representatives of more than 170 countries.

All together, these Plans of Action have created a sort of global constitution* sui generis*, built around a few strong idealogies that are demonstrating their capacity to subtaintially influence and modify the legislation of many countries.

All of these conferences approved a twenty-year Plan of Action (containing a commitment to verify the status of achieving its goals every five years). While addressing diverse issues, these Plans of Action followed a common thread that wound accordingly around the concept of sustainable development.

All together, these Plans of Action have created a sort of global constitution *sui generis*, built around a few strong ideologies that are demonstrating their capacity to substantially influence and modify the legislation of many countries. For example, even the Treaty of the European Union incorporated the concept of sustainable development.[22] But apart from this, to the UN International Conferences we must also credit the concepts of reproductive health and reproductive rights (Cairo), gender identity (Cairo and Beijing),

22 *Versione consolidata del Trattato sull'Unione Europea*, Gazzetta ufficiale delle Comunità Europee, 24 Dicembre 2002, Preambolo.

the precaution principle (Rio de Janeiro), and all others that reference sustainable development. It is worthy of note that such concepts fall within a wider attempt to fix a set of "universal values" or better, a "global ethic," to whose realization all religions are also called upon to collaborate.[23]

The United Nations Division for Sustainable Development finally reaffirmed the centrality of the population issue, which was instituted in the meantime.[24] In its brief description of the population issue, inserted among the principle arguments linked to sustainable development, it clearly affirms that, "The growth of world population and production combined with unsustainable consumption patterns places increasingly severe stress on the life-supporting capacities of the earth. These interactive processes affect the use of land, water, air, energy and other resources."[25] The Commission on Sustainable Development then extensively confronted the demographic problem by reuniting in two annual sessions following the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Third (April 11–28, 1995) and the Fourth (April 18–May 3, 1996).

The Third session made evident the UN's effort — including its economic effort — to develop national and regional programs regarding "information on the relationship between demographic tendencies and sustainable development" (no. 72–86), and to insert the demographic question inside policies for the environment and for development (no. 87–106). In the Fourth session particular attention to programs on reproductive health was added, with specific reference to family planning (no. 6–9).

In this way, the foundations for a decisive change in global and national policies were neatly in place. In the name of sustainable development, specific population control programs (that is, birth-control programs) would cease to exist, but would enter in full force into programs that encourage development, environmental protection, and supply basic healthcare. This change achieved a double aim: on one part multiplying the funds and resources available for birth control programs (while masking the real financial involvement), and the other rendering birth control programs more acceptable for poor countries, who before had exercised a certain resistance to direct population control programs that were perceived as a neo-colonial instrument.

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23 The first attempt to codify a "Global Ethic" was with the Report of the UN Commission on Global Governance, entitled *Our Global Neighborhood*, 1995.

24 The Division makes up part of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs and reunites the analogous commission once a year.

25 Commission on Sustainable Development, Demographic dynamics and sustainability no. 5 cfr. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_demographics.shtml

A Concept with Many Contradictions

Certainly, from the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development until today much progress has been made, and this theory has also been made the object of deeper study, distinction, clarification, application, and so on. Throughout the world are thousands and thousands of seminars and research projects dedicated to the cause of sustainable development, but if this demonstrates on one hand the popularity the concept has gained, by the same token it also testifies to its weakness, beginning with its very terminology. "Development" and "sustainable" are, in fact, terms originally contradictory to one another: "development" is a term used mostly in economics and implies an undefined growth period, while "sustainability" is based on the necessity to place limits. Moreover, many seminars and study groups admit the difficulty of translating "sustainability" concretely, in that it is a very vague concept that can define only on a basic level the quality and the priority of resources considered available. This creates an enormous obstacle, seeing as it's impossible to define once and for all the quantity of resources and of accounting for every possible variable.

The vagueness of the concept also hides a major snare, in that it excessively increases the arbitrary nature of what things are considered sustainable and what is not sustainable as defined by whoever handles the power play by play. It is a very concrete threat in light of the very structure of the United Nations, where true decisive power is in the hands of lobbyists and bureaucrats who control the various agencies[26] without being held accountable to the electors. If nothing else, the history of sustainable development acts as an example; the concept was conceived by an intellectual elite, experts and politicians, and has become in just a few years the crux of all global and local policies, without there ever being a serious debate on the theory's validity.

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26 The UN system takes into account 40 other agencies, including development (UNDP), population (UNFPA), environment (UNEP), children (UNIFCEF), health (OMS), and food (FAO), to cite many of the most well-known.

The Latest Invention: The Ecological Footprint

To complete the picture of sustainable development's application and use, it is necessary to also challenge a similar concept that is a natural evolution of the original: the ecological footprint.

The ecological footprint is defined as "[the] area of land and water a human population requires to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb its waste under prevalent technology."[27] Considering that the current world population is a little higher than 6 billion people, and the "biosphere [is] calculated as 11.3 billion hectares, (one quarter of the whole terrestrial surface)," equilibrium is possible only if all persons use on average 1.8 hectares a year, according to the theorists promoting the ecological footprint.[28] However, keeping in mind that according to the UN estimates, the world population will arrive at its proper maximum around 2050 and reach a stable equilibrium at around 9 billion persons, already today we must prepare ourselves to stay within an ecological footprint estimate of 1.4 hectares.

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The idea of an ecological footprint aspires to be a true and proper unit of measurement with scientific pretenses, in order to overcome criticisms regarding the broad and vague nature of sustainable development. In other

27 *See* the site of the Global Footprint Network, http://www.footprintnetwork.org. The definition cited may be found at this address: http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=footprint_overview.

28 Mathis Wackernagel, *Three planets would be needed*, interview appearing on the site of the association Greenaccord. http://www.greenaccord.org/portale/article.asp?id=95

words, we could say that the ecological footprint is the unit of measurement representing sustainable development. The concept was conceived in a research doctorate that Mathis Wackernagel, a mechanical engineer of Swiss origin, together with Professor William Rees, presented at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (Canada). Together they synthesized their study in a book released in 1996 titled *Our Ecological Footprint*,[29] which (thanks to its adoption by the World Wildlife Federation) instantly became the theoretical foundation to support various ecological theses.[30]

The method's presumed scientific rigor is an important issue to raise, because from reviewing it's history, we see that the measurements being introduced are intended to give an objective criterion to that which would otherwise be at the mercy of subjective perception. To illustrate the point, how can we measure the distance between New York and Washington with only our mere individual perception? Here enters, then, the introduction of the meter as a unit of measurement that permits establishing with precision, and in an objective way, the distance between New York and Washington aside from how we individually perceive it. To introduce a concept like the ecological footprint, that claims to be a unit of measurement, induces the idea in the collective imagination that it functions objectively, unquestionably, and accurately calibrates the proper means of living.

In reality, as we will see, it is instead an effort to apply a particular and biased ideology to reality and attempts to pass itself off as objective and unquestionable using the guise of a unit of measurement. So it is good to clarify at once that the ecological footprint does not bear any resemblance to what we see with the decimal metric system, and its objectivity is only presumed. Above all, its aim is to create a psychological state —

Above all, [the ecological footprint's] aim is to create a psychological state — inducing a sense of guilt — that encourages people to change their typical lifestyle.

29 William Rees, Mathis Wackernagel, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, The New Catalyst 1996. There is also an Italian version: *L'impronta ecologica. Come ridurre l'impatto dell'uomo sulla terra* [TRANS: *The Ecological Footprint. How to reduce the impact of man on the earth*], Edizioni Ambiente (first edition 1996, last edition 2004).

30 The Global Footprint Network, an institution created by Mathis Wackernagel, works in close contact with the WWF, and in fact is among the principle inspirations of the reports of the most well-known international environmentalist associations. An example, the Living Planet Report of 2004, downloadable at this internet address: http://www.panda.org/news_facts/publications/key_publications/living_planet_report/index.cfm

inducing a sense of guilt — that encourages people to change their typical lifestyle. In fact, the Global Footprint Network warns us that already "humanity's Ecological Footprint is over 23% larger than what the planet can regenerate."[31] Today, each person alone already consumes practically 2.2 hectares of land, generating an "ecological deficit" that obviously gets compounded. The Global Footprint Network explains, "Ecological footprints enable people to take personal and collective action in support of a world where humanity lives within the means of one planet."[32]

To get a clearer idea, we simply have to calculate the individual ecological footprint.[33] It involves a popular but simple test of 15 questions about one's style of life. Beginning with the continent and the size of the city in which one lives, one can take into consideration the scale of the family nucleus, the dimensions of one's house, the type of food one consumes, electric energy and water use, distances traveled with public and private transportation, etc. For example; a person who lives in Italy, south of Milan, in a family of four, living in an apartment of 85 m², who eats meat and dairy products at least once a day, who typically uses an automobile of average cubic capacity for going to work in the Lombard capital (and for a few vacations), who normally uses electricity and water, and produces an average quantity of refuse, annually consumes 5.4 hectares of earth. Such a person, living modestly and not in excess, is already 4 times over the prescribed rate of consumption. The manner in which this data is presented sounds a note of "danger", with an image of three planet spheres, above it written, "If everyone lived like you, we would need three planets."

The estimated national ecological footprint confirms the absurdity of the theory. According to Mathis Wackernagle, originator of the ecological footprint and current director of the Global Footprint Network,[34] Italy has an index of 3,89 hectares per capita. That is, all Italians on average and ecologically speaking, live two or more times above their proper capacity, or better, above the capacity of the planet.[35] It is interesting to see in what

31 *See* http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=footprint_overview.

32 Ibid.

33 The test, in its most simple and popular form, is presented in numerous environmentalist sites, and the original is found at http://www.ecofoot.org.

34 It is an institute preoccupying itself with studying the ecological footprint and promoting consciousness and application. Among numerous sponsors figure Ambiente Italia, a society of environmental services, among whose partners we find Rete Lilliput and the Department of climate science of the University of Siena.

35 Luca Sciortino, *Dimmi come vivi e ti dirò quanto inquini* [TRANS: *Tell Me How You Live and I Will Tell You How Much You Pollute*], interview with Mathis Wackernagel.

manner we can scale back to the allowed 1.8 hectares or, even better, within 1.4, seeing that the population is destined to grow.

Consequently, it is important to ask what is the ideal style of life towards which these ecologists want to carry humanity? The answer seems thus; the citizen above would have to live by himself in a single house of 30 square meters at most, possibly without running water and without electricity, he would have to become vegetarian and gather his main food directly from the earth (industrially processed food causes a sharp rise in the ecological footprint); he would have to renounce his car and, possibly, also public means of transportation (in short, travel as little as possible and, at the most, travel by foot and bicycle). In this manner he would succeed at reducing his ecological footprint to 1.3 hectares (which leaves some room for error). In short, the ecological objective results in what common sense defines as absolute poverty, and in long terms the self-extinction of human kind. If, in fact, leaving aside the other parameters, the same citizen of southern Milan were inserted into the initial family unit described (4 persons in a habitation between 60 and 90 m²), the ecological footprint immediately arrives at 2.1 hectares. Therefore such living situations are unsustainable, if we follow the ecological reasoning.

The ecological footprint of individual nations provides further insight, where we see that those accused of the worst ecological deficit are the developed countries. The case of the two Koreas illustrates this, divided at the 38° parallel after the end of the bloody war of 1950–53. The communist North tried the road of self-sufficiency, fell into a very grave food crisis at the end of the 1990's that lost around two million persons to famine, and resulted in grave malnutrition for the other half of the population. The South, of Western influence, even though it started from an economically disadvantaged position in comparison to the North, was in the 1990's already one of Asia's most dynamic economies, and today can consider itself definitely leaving underdevelopment behind.[36]

Well then, looking at the statistics of the *Global Footprint Network*, we discover that North Korea finds itself in better conditions (that is, with a lower ecological deficit) in regards to the base bio-capacity (capacity of generating resources). Their ecological footprint in itself, in fact, is 1.5 hectares annually per capita; meanwhile, in the South it is currently 4.4. hectares. An interesting aspect is to observe the evolution of the ecological

36 For a major comparison of the historical-economic evolution of the two Koreas, cfr. Riccardo Cascioli, *Lo strano caso delle due Corree* [TRANS: *The Strange Case of the Two Koreas*] in AA.VV. *Debito da morire*, [TRANS: *Debt by dying*], Baldini & Castoldi 2000.

footprint of North Korea from 1961 to 2002: from the 1960's to the 1980's, the curve of the footprint increased, thanks above all to energy support and food supplied by the Soviet Union and China. But with the collapse of the USSR at the beginning of the 1990's and diminished aid from China, North Korea entered into a profound economic crisis that led to famine, and the ecological footprint descended in a directly proportional manner. It is remarkable to see the interpretation given to its situation by the Global Footprint Network. Making reference to the communist North Korean ideology of self-sufficiency (or "Juche"), it reads: "North Korea prepared itself for "self-sufficiency," but through bad management failed to realize it. When economic and political shocks forced the country to abruptly close its longstanding ecological deficit, a tragic famine resulted. Similarly, our planet as a whole is 'self-reliant,' with no recourse to external trade or aid. North Korea is a sobering example of what can happen when a society meets nature's constraints unprepared."[37]

Therefore, according to these "scientists," the problem of North Korea is not the ideology of "self-sufficiency" which has reduced a country that started with a good economic foundation to famine. No, on the contrary, that same ideology that leveled North Korea must be held by the world as a positive example and applied to global policies. Instead the problem is apparently bad management; had the policy makers adequately prepared the population for inevitable "constrictions imposed by nature," it would have been enough.

One cannot avoid the fact that the ultimate goal of those who hold this approach is not development, but rather healing the ecological deficit. In fact South Korea, which has developed itself, has notably worsened its ecological deficit. Therefore, the "preparation" consists essentially in making progress towards a poverty generalized through power returning inside the resources that the planet places at our disposal. Simply put, the ideal that Wackernagel, *et al.* have in mind is a world transformed into an immense North Korea, poor and backwards, only a little better managed to avoid the worst crises.

Such analyses reveal a stupefying ideological interpretation. North Korea's problem, in fact, does not lie in the limits placed by nature, but in the absurd ideology of a communist regime that for 50 years has continued to prepare itself in view of an atomic war with South Korea, investing enormous sums in military expenses and in swelling the ranks of one of the most numerous armies in the world.[38]

37 *See* http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=footprint_nkorea.

38 Riccardo Cascioli, ibid.

The Church and Sustainable Development

These examples, regarding either poor countries or those that are rich, send us back to the essence of sustainable development, so synthetically affirmed in Agenda 21, that point 5.3 affirms: "The growth of the world population and production combined with unsustainable levels of consumption places increasingly severe stress on the life-supporting capacities of our planet." This affirms the two points of sustainable development: limit population in poor countries and stop economic growth in rich countries. All in order to restore an anticipated ruined ecological equilibrium.[39]

Already this explains the mistrust — not to mention the hostility — of the Catholic Church in confronting sustainable development. It is enough to remember the words pronounced by the representatives of the Holy See to the International Seminar at the Vatican on the theme "Climate Changes and Development" that overthrew the established approach to the question. Monsignor Giampaolo Crepaldi, secretary of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, clarified that the "Church has as its principal preoccupation the development of poor countries," for which "climate changes cannot become a pretext to impede the development of the Third World."[40] This was echoed by Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, at the same Pontifical Council, who has affirmed that, "environmental problems

39 The Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine, issued by the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace outlines the Church's position on the environment and sustainable development in paragraphs 466–, while paragraphs 463–465 critique the secular understanding of sustainable development. Paragraph 483 makes mention of population control policies and sustainable development. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20TEN

40 Monsignor Giampaolo Crepaldi quoted in "Le tesi catastrofiste sul clima non convincono il Vaticano" (Climate catastrophism doesn't convince the Holy See), Il Giornale del Popolo (Lugano, Switzerland), 15 May 2007, http://www.schmanck.de/070515-GiorPop.pdf. See also "Il clima cambia, il Vaticano no" (Climate changes, the Vatican doesn't), Adista Agency News no. 33/2007, http://www.adistaonline.it/?op=articolo&id=31367

cannot constitute a motive for promoting birth control policies."[41]

To this purpose, while concluding the seminar, Cardinal Martino denounced the "ecologism" that "often emerges in debate on population problems and on the relationship between population, environment and development. On the occasion of the International Conference of Cairo on Population and Development in 1994, which the Holy See participated in as a head delegation, the Holy See had to oppose, together with many Third World countries, the idea that population growth in the next ten years would be of such a state to bring the collapse of the planet's natural equilibrium and hinder development. As already indicated, close to the eve of the Cairo Conference of 1994, the Holy See — through the Pontifical Council for the Family — preoccupied itself with warning about the adoption of the concept of sustainable development in a document dedicated to the "Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends," that states:

> Raw statistics are brought up to explain the relationship between demographic growth and births. According to this kind of thinking, birth control is the indispensable precondition for the "sustainable development" of poor countries. By *sustainable development* is meant a development where the different factors involved (food, health, education, technology, population, environment, etc.) are brought into harmony so as to avoid unbalanced growth and the waste of resources. The developed countries define for other countries what must be, from their point of view, "sustainable development." This explains why certain rich countries and major international organizations are willing to help these countries, but on one condition-that they accept programs for the systematic control of their births. (no. 24)

> [The Church] cannot subscribe to alarmist views concerning the different world population trends. With the passing of the years the facts show the necessity of completely re-examining this alarmist interpretation (…) These ideologies underestimate not only natural resources, but, above all, the capacity of the human person to exploit these resources more judiciously — beginning with human resources. They underestimate the capacity of the human person to distribute resources better and to provide institutions

41 Cardinal Renato Martino, Ibid.

> for human society which can be both efficient and respectful of the demands of justice. (no. 61)

These words express a clear consciousness of the true ideological and cultural roots in which the concept of "sustainable development" was generated: a negative vision of man that as its logical consequence hopes for the advent of a decreased human presence on the earth. The Church instead, says again Cardinal Martino in the speech concluding the seminar of April 2007, "proposes a realistic vision of things. It has confidence in man and in his ever-new capacity to search for solutions to problems that history places before him. A capacity that permits him to disprove the often recurrent, inauspicious and improbably catastrophic forecasts. The Church also knows, however, that the human act in confrontations with nature must be ethically oriented. The ecological problem is therefore perceived as an ethical problem."

With the concept of "sustainable development" establishing itself universally, even the Church — above all in the Pope's operations and those of the Holy See representatives in international institutions — began to use this term. The use of such an expression therefore appears motivated, above all, by the desire to instill in pubic discourse such a concept with a meaning close to the Social Doctrine of the Church.

This can also be gathered from the careful analysis contained in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church that the Papal Council for Justice and Peace edited in 2005. For its distinction of being the first work in which the Holy See systematically synthesizes and organizes all of its social teachings, such a Compendium is certainly the principle source to turn to in order to understand the judgment of the Church on sustainable development. We discover that such a concept does not find space in the Church's teachings. Sustainability is cited a single time in n. 483, in the chapter dedicated to Safeguarding the environment, and recalls the relationship between "the development of the poorest countries and a sustainable use of the environment." Moreover, the same paragraph clearly confirms that, "demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development."

Policy Recommendations

As we have seen, the concept of sustainable development has now entered into common parlance even in international documents and institutions. Thus it becomes impossible, at least in the short term, to try to oppose its use in the international forum. However, having full knowledge of the meaning of the concept and why it was proposed and adopted, policy changes should be examined on several fronts:

- Sustainable development's use in the international forum should be limited as much as possible. Instead it should be replaced with concrete content that does not leave space for misunderstandings. For example, rather than referring to a "sustainable agriculture," a vague concept that is used in several areas to focus on organic farming and ban genetically modified (GM) foods, it is preferable to specify what one means. For example, it might be replaced with, "A productive agricultural method that emphasizes the need to feed the population while limiting the depleting impact on the environment."

- When it is inevitable that international documents use the term "sustainable development," it is important to always try to add a reference to the centrality of the human person and explain the concept that "in any way, sustainability may not be construed as a limitation to humanity." Where the use of the concept of sustainability is linked specifically to the population it must be explained "in no way should this interfere with the freedom of couples to decide how many children they have." This has become crucial not only for developing countries, but also for industrialized countries, where more and more explicitly in the name of environmental protection and climate change, policy-makers affirm the need to set a limit to the number of births for couples to a maximum of two. Just take for example the reports of an influential British Association, Population Matters (formerly Optimum Population Trust),[42] whose founder Jonathon Porritt was

42 http://populationmatters.org

head of the Sustainable Development Commission from 2000 to 2009, which was created by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair. This organization is fighting to import in European countries, starting with the United Kingdom, the "Chinese model" of population control. Their proposal is to remove any type of social assistance for the third child in order to discourage additional births.

- It is important to strongly promote a concept that is in its origin diametrically opposed to population control, the tradition of the Social Doctrine of the Church: that of integral human development. This is the subject of the Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*,[43] which should be studied and offered as an alternative. It places man at the center of reflection and of every political action, that man is the object of every action and characterizes development: "The Christian vocation to development helps to promote the advancement of all men and the whole man."(no. 18) It is a concept that is not limited to the examination of the economic and social dimension of human development, but directs all activities for the common good, which "consists of several items: from material goods, cognitive, and institutional moral and spiritual goods, the latter of which are higher and the first should be subjected to them."[44] Integral human development is opposed to sustainable development because man is not seen as a threat to the balance of the planet itself, but as the key resource to make the world better and habitable for all. Integral development is premised on the freedom of man, on his ability to use it to live in the truth, and not simply as restriction. Knowing this encyclical and promoting its content is key to countering the pitfalls of sustainability.

Man is not seen as a threat to the balance of the planet itself, but as the key resource to make the world better and habitable for all.

43 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 29 giugno 2009. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html

44 Benedetto XVI, Discorso ai partecipanti al Convegno promosso dalla Fondazione Centesimus Annus-Pro Pontifice sulla relazione tra "Sviluppo, progresso e bene comune", Roma 22 maggio 2010.

Further Implications and Concluding Thoughts

From what we have examined so far, in the defense and promotion of human dignity, the issue of "sustainable development" is of utmost importance. Sustainability is not just a way to reconcile economic development with environmental protection, as is often said. It was, instead, the result of an anti-human ideology that reduces man as a threat to himself and the whole Earth. For this reason, beyond various arguments, the true foundation of sustainability lay in the attempt to limit human presence from both the quantitative point of view (i.e. birth control and euthanasia) and from the point of view of quality (blocking economic growth). This negative view of man, of which the environmental catastrophism is both cause and effect, is translated into an extension of the power of States and supranational institutions. They dictate that if man is evil, he is the "cancer of the planet," as some argue, and therefore, there must be a strong state power to keep man under control. It is no coincidence that in the intellectual and political circles people are beginning to talk more openly about the passing of democracy. One guru of environmentalism, James Lovelock, refers to what he considers the tragedy of climate change, which is obviously caused by men. For Lovelock the "modern democracy" is the biggest obstacle to action: "Even the greatest democracies agree that when approaching a major war, democracy should be suspended indefinitely. I feel that climate change is as serious an issue as a war. So it is necessary to suspend democracy for a while."[45] The Australian scientist and writer Tim Flannery devotes a chapter of his book *The Weather Makers* to this topic, foreshadowing the emergence of a "Commission for the thermostatic control of the Earth," which arises from the Kyoto Protocol and whose characteristics are similar to the real proposals to create an international tribunal ecological environment and to use carbon dioxide as an international currency.

45 Leo Hickman, James Lovelock: *Humans are too stupid to prevent climate change*, The Guardian, 29 March 2010

Even more worrying is the fact that the Club of Rome has long been the promoter of the "end of democracy." Already in 1991 a report entitled "The First Global Revolution"[46] outlined the program: "Democracy is not a panacea. It cannot organize everything and is aware of its limitations. These are facts that must be seen clearly. As it may sound sacrilegious, democracy is no longer appropriate for the goals that we face. The complexity and technical nature of many of today's problems do not always allow elected representatives to make correct decisions at the right time."[47]

The pervasive power of the state on people's lives is already a reality, and not only in totalitarian countries: if the tragic systems of coercive birth control in China and India are known, it is most surprising that in the name of sustainability, on average Western countries, and in the words of politicians, the outrage at the brutal violation of human rights is increasingly replaced by indifference and admiration for the rapid way in which action was taken to "solve" the problem, and to propose similar legislation in Europe. But for decades in a West that experienced a drop in fertility, this utilitarian mindset — which also sees man as a function of the state — is addressed mainly to euthanasia. In a revealing editorial in the *New York Times* written on July 14, 2011[48] by David Brooks in full panic regarding the default risk of the United States, Brooks says:

> This fiscal crisis is about many things, but one of them is our inability to face death — our willingness to spend our nation into bankruptcy to extend life for a sickly few more months. The fiscal crisis is driven largely by health care costs. We have the illusion that in spending so much on health care we are radically improving the quality of our lives. We have the illusion that through advances in medical research we are in the process of eradicating deadly diseases. We have the barely suppressed hope that someday all this spending and innovation will produce something close to immortality.

According to Brooks, the main problems of the deficit arise from the attempt to "marginally extend the lives of the very sick," and reports in

46 Alexander King-Bertrand Schneider, *The First Global Revolution – A Report by the Council of the Club of Rome*, Pnatheon 1991, visibile a questo indirizzo web: http://www.archive.org/stream/TheFirstGlobalRevolution#page/n19/mode/2up

47 Ibid, p.75.

48 *The New York Times* July 14, 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/opinion/15brooks.html?_r=1

support of this thesis the greatly increased health care costs for Alzheimer's patients. This is the conclusion: "Obviously, we are never going to cut off Alzheimer's Patients and leave them out on a hillside. We are never going to coercively give up on the old and ailing. But it is hard to see us reducing health care inflation seriously unless people are willing to and their families are willing to...confront death and their obligations to the living." In this way, euthanasia ceases to be an extreme form of self-determination, but rather becomes a kind of civic duty to educate in all patients.

In the name of the sustainability people are denied any meaning in life beyond physical and mental efficiency. In order to fight the claim of sustainable development, it is necessary to give the reasons for one's life, one's desire for freedom, justice and truth that is common to every person of every age and every culture.

In order to fight the claim of sustainable development, it is necessary to give the reason of one's life, one's desire for freedom, justice and truth that is common to every person of every age and every culture.

BIOGRAPHY

Riccardo Cascioli is an italian journalist, editor of "La Bussola Quotidiana" (The daily compass), an online daily newspaper (www.labussolaquotidiana.it), formerly founder and president of the European Center of Research on Population, Development, and the Environment (CESPAS). He has authored several books and as a journalist he has covered international issues including refugee crises in South East Asia, the Middle East, Somalia and Taiwan in addition to covering various UN conferences including Rio Conference (1992), and the Cairo Conference (1994).

Cascioli's books include *I padroni del pianeta* (The Lords of the Planet), which explores the relationship between population and resources; *2012: Catastrofismo e fine dei tempi* (Catastrophism and the end of the world); *Perché la Chiesa ha ragione* (Why the Church is Right), which documents the right position of the Social Doctrin of the Church on life, family, education, population, Aids, development, environment). As well as *Il Complotto Demografico*, which explains the strategies, aims and the political and economic interests behind the population control movement; *La Possible Globalizzazione*, which explores globalization; and *Le Bugie degli Ambientalisti*, which is a critical exploration of the claims of the environmental movement.

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