

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

January 13, 2011 at 9:20am

Moving beyond 'jobs at any price'

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Eco Catholic

Emotions run high when discussing unemployment. Most of us have a loved one who can't find work. We murmur and worry about how they are going to survive. We can empathize, imagining ourselves out in the streets with no home, begging for food. The instinct for survival is primal and strong, and our current economy brings up many fears. Nothing is certain anymore. The days of milk and honey and unlimited prosperity appear to be gone. Being able to work is not a given anymore.

All we can collectively think of is, "We have to create more jobs." And usually that means jobs like we are used to, jobs that revolve around producing goods and jobs created by big corporations or government. There's only one tiny little problem with this—the way we've structured our economy, and thus our jobs, is unsustainable. There it is again—that naughty word that no one wants to utter, that innocuous-sounding word explosive with calamitous consequences.

Many think, "Well, we had plenty of jobs in the past. Let's just return to what we used to do." How typical that we usually redouble our efforts when something doesn't work and try harder to make it work, rather than look to a new solution (think beating the dead horse image). We can't go back to some glory days of our country teeming with natural resources spilled out in homage at our feet. We were like diners at a big banquet gorging ourselves on all the available food, oblivious to the fact that the pantry held no more. It's a new day and age. Because of our poor choices, the vitality of the Earth has plummeted, and with it, its ability to support the kind of jobs and lifestyle we've come to expect. Exploitation of the Earth has not come cheaply, and we have our dues to pay.

We've always had the mentality that all jobs are good. After all, they give us a paycheck which enables us to care for our families, surely a noble and necessary thing. We've never been taught to question whether jobs are life-giving or not for the planet and the wider community. That fact that jobs produce

money has been justification enough for our participation in them. But surely as Christians, we have higher values than that. Why are we willing to look the other way when the businesses that employ us exploit the poor, produce harmful products, and pollute the Earth?

States vie for the chance to be home to factory farms, casinos, coal-burning power plants, nuclear weapons manufacturing, etc. without a flicker of conscience about how bad they are on so many levels. The fact that they create jobs foolishly trumps every other consideration.

It is hard for me not to want to tear my hair out about this. Are we this blind as a society? Are we so brainwashed that we can't see the truth that knocks us up the side of our heads? What good are jobs if they are harmful and ruining the Earth, the very source of all jobs in the future? Surely we aren't so short-sighted and selfish that all we care about is our survival, and to hell with everyone else, to animals, to future generations, to breathable air and drinkable water, to the whole darn planet.

I don't have time to go into the implications of all this, but in a nutshell, we must put the welfare of the Earth first, yes FIRST, when considering existing jobs or the creation of new ones. Nothing must take precedence. If something isn't sustainable and life-giving, it must be altered to be so, or must go. Things are that serious. I know this can't happen overnight, but we can at least get moving in the right direction instead of plunging blindly over the cliff along with the rest of the lemmings.

The good news is that the Earth is unbelievably intelligent and compassionate to us, its erring offspring, and will help us in every conceivable way if we mend our ways. And fortunately many are waking up from our collective delusions, and are envisioning and working for a sustainable way of life and economy in harmony with nature and God's wise plan for creation.

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