

Moving Beyond the Limits of Environmental Politics

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In his address Bishop Pilla offers a powerful and moving moral vision of a more just society. In this vision the Bishop makes two major steps forward in our thinking about the nexus between the built environment and social justice. First, he acknowledges that individual locational decisions are a powerful driver of where society invests scarce capital and the spatial dimensions of that new environment. By fully acknowledging the degree to which these decisions shape our society, the nature of the economy, and the direction of governmental investment the Bishop has taken a stand against the implicit injustice in this process. The second step forward was to actually articulate a solution—that every dollar invested outside the traditional urban core must be matched by another dollar that can be used to rebuild the urban core, and create meaningful jobs, maintaining the relevance of urban residents to the rest of society.

If there is room for further expansion of the Bishop's position, it should be in the context of how urban sprawl is also an environmental issue. While this Bishop acknowledges the problem there is little substantial discussion of the issue in most of the Church in the City process. In part, this was no doubt a rational decision based on a need to appeal to the parishioners of his Diocese and the difficulty of motivating people to change their behavior for something as abstract as the environment. What I would like to do is to discuss the linkage between the environment, urban sprawl and the social justice concerns the Bishop has espoused. I would then like to examine the use of green taxes that could simultaneously promote a more socially equitable spatial development pattern while still allowing for true growth and protecting the environment.