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## Review of *The Gospel of Sustainability: Media, Market, and LOHAS*. By Monica M. Emerich

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**The Gospel of Sustainability: Media, Market, and LOHAS.**

By Monica M. Emerich. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. xvii + 232 pp. Appendix, references, index. \$50.00 cloth.

One could well imagine the Emperor Constantine telling the creators of the early versions of the Bible, “The texts [should] tell users that they are conscious, wise, alert, and savvy while also being progressive, modern, chic, and cutting-edge.” Then again, maybe not. Many of those who are writing today’s gospels of sustainability are telling consumers to be all these things as they seek to turn interests in health and the environment into economic gains. Much like the early Christians whose worlds were turned upside down when Constantine converted to their faith and began the process of moving worship ceremonies from homes into large churches where priests demanded tithes, those who have lived off the land are finding their way of life co-opted by the rich and powerful. It is no longer enough to grow your own food to be considered environmentally conscious. According to Emerich in *The Gospel of Sustainability*, being green means driving a hydrogen-powered car, patronizing businesses that sell free-trade coffee, and subscribing to the proper magazines.

Emerich provides a backstage pass (as well as front-stage views in the form of quotes from conferences and media stories) where one can view how the conflicts around sustainability

arose and are maintained as various actors try both to meld and tear apart capitalism and wanton consumerism, desiring to live lives that will translate into more resources for future generations. What may be more interesting to those studying macrostructures is the fact that even to have a movement as portrayed by Emerich—referred to as Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS)—there must be large amounts of capital that will bring media and big business attention to the demands being made. This is even more exciting if the demands are being made by the Walmarts and The Men's Warehouses of the world.

After trudging through the battles and compromises between capitalism and sustainability, the reader is asked the following question at the beginning of the concluding chapter: "How are we to live?" Emerich ends that same section with, "In essence, LOHAS presents a way in which to think about late capitalism as both ruination and remedy." If you are confused, you are not alone. Being confused, however, seems to be the

point. In late modernity, the path to enlightenment is through consultation with experts. The LOHAS experts are those who are selling the products consumers need to understand how they are to live a better life. The good life is not necessarily gained by making your own clothes and composting, though those can help as long as you have purchased the right guidebooks telling you how to do those things, but by purchasing green products.

Finally, we cannot talk about gospels without talking about faith. According to Emerich, true change in the area of sustainability will only happen with the right forms of spiritual capital. The trick is deciding who is selling the right stuff at the right price.

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