

Pontifex: A Builder of Bridges

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Today many concerned people are becoming convinced that divisions between rich and poor are so great and deepening that they are tearing our social fabric apart. As an environmental advocate, I find it impossible to talk about my mission of healing our wounded Earth without focusing on a critical review of the social and economic structures of our world. Environmental issues can be properly addressed when we face the impact of the practices of the affluent on the environment and the influence exerted by the wealthy to force others to refrain from discussing these issues. With the rapid concentration of wealth through globalization, the pressure to remain silent about the effects of capitalism on our wounded Earth and the poor is all the more pronounced. For those of us who champion democratic process, the concentration of wealth is all the more threatening because the grounds in which free discussion may occur are so controlled by the privileged few in the media. Many, even within the environmental movement, remain silent; we wonder how many of them could trace their silence to funding sources.

The need to speak. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln who could not envision our nation remaining half slave and half free, we cannot as Christian people committed to the poor continue to tolerate a world situation of immense wealth and grinding poverty, of haves and have-nots, of the imperial rich and the despairing poor. The myth that consumption and use of goods (autos, appliances, computers, pleasure boats, resource-rich food, etc.) are needed to operate our global economic and social system is despoiling the resources of our fragile planet and promoting an atmosphere of borrow now and pay later, of operating on the credit card, and of supporting our unsustainable ways through a massive military expenditure amounting to one and a half trillion dollars a year worldwide (half U.S. funds). Fiscal conservatives realize that this is bankrupting our nation at the rate of ten thousand dollars a second. The need to return to sustainability is as great today as it was in Jeremiah's day. Will it be heard?

Jesus calls. We who are committed to Jesus cannot remain silent, for he never did; we must say it as it is, because he did; we must start a conflagration, because he invited us to; we must speak because in doing so we spread the Good News -- "the commons belongs to all and with divine help and sacramental life we can help establish God's kingdom on our wounded and crucified Earth and among its poor." Each of us will be called to stand before the Judgment Seat of God, and we may be asked whether we helped feed the hungry at our doorstep. "Where were they Lord, not at my front door?" The Lord's reply may be this question, "You watched television and used the Internet; why didn't you look and see the hungry?" Remaining silent causes our Christian organizations to lose their *raison d'être* and makes a mockery of their mission.

Love is greater than fear. While fear of individual or community losses is understandable, we are called to deeper reasons for our option for the poor, namely the love of God and the commitment to be with the crucified Jesus who suffers with the hungry and those displaced by the cruel effects of global warming.

We want not only to hear Jesus but to be with him. As Jesuits and associates we are at the service of our Holy Father who sees these divisions of rich and poor and has called for our help. He reminds us that our preferential option for the poor "is implicit in the Christological faith in God who for us became poor, to enrich us with his poverty"(2 Cor. 8:9). Enrichment can come only in seeing ourselves among the poor and not at a distance from them. Our deepest calling is to love the poor and embrace ways of doing things conceived and activated by the poor. Yes, we must be within the poor community so that our effect will be greater through internal catalytic action. "We the poor" is our goal.

Called to be bridge-builders. As Jesuits, our responses are to be colored by the documents of the recently released 35th General Congregation (GC 35), in which we find the image of bridge builders between rich and poor. *The complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered demand that we build bridges between rich and poor, establishing advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests* (GC 35, D.3, n.28). The pope or Roman Pontiff is not a single party builder of bridges, but he offers to share that mission with all Christians and especially with those vowed to be with him in this mission. In ancient Rome a member of the supreme order of priests was a *Pontifex*. Certainly we Jesuits do not take our charism from that ancient order, but from Jesus the primary builder of bridges -- and through him from and with his vicar the current Roman Pontiff.

Together with exploring the nature of our bridge-building in the twenty-first century we need to propose establishing advocacy links between those in political power and those who find it hard to voice their just aspirations. That must come shortly.

Our audience and goal. This draft position paper is directed to several groups: to Jesuits who are being called by our Holy Father to work among and for the poor; to our colleagues in the many apostolates in which we are engaged; and to parishioners and even the readers of this <earthhealing.info> website (over a half million visitors last month). We expect to continue our goal -- to spread the Good News. In 2008 the Good News of Christ continues to be incarnational (a united spiritual and physical message) and in this time in history it needs to be a message of sustainability, that is, a belief in the future, something lacking among chronic borrowers of money.

Go out to all the world. Thus this reflection is not some "internal" document meant for the eyes of a few; rather it is intended to go out to all the world. It is not a criticism of

what we have or have not done in the past, for that would only frustrate many willing people and be used by some as an excuse for continued silence. The message to be like Jesus, the perfect ecologist, ought to be perfectly balanced, that is, it is both confrontational and filled with love and mercy. Thus, in this Pauline Year with its expected evangelistic message, our twenty-first century Good News involves preaching Christ crucified in and among the poor and downtrodden of this world.

The cry of the crucified. The poor suffer immensely today not only from earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters, but also from chronic food shortages and rising energy costs. These costs increase so fast that, if we quote today's price for grain or oil, their estimate would outdated this work tomorrow. We learn that as of 2008 some 982 million of the world's people are considered by the Food Security Survey (U.S. Department of Agriculture) to be receiving less than the minimum 2,100 calories of food per day. The United Nations estimates that 100 million of these are threatened with chronic levels of hunger. At this time several million Somali in the drought-stricken Horn of Africa face starvation, with thousands of infants and youngsters showing the extended bellies and change of hair color that are associated with starvation. Food storage bins are empty in many lands and yet the need rises with each passing day. Jesus asks in this time of the conversion of Paul, "Why do you persecute me?"

Note on America's poor. One of my own parishes at Stanton, Kentucky, has had to stop its food handout program to dozens of families in our poverty-stricken Powell County because food giveaways are cutting deeply into the small cash reserve of this parish. In place of such handouts we are giving only essential staples and we are trying to teach homemakers how to cook tasty meals with the simpler foods at hand. Such is prosperous America!

America's other side. America today lives the parable of Lazarus and Dives; we have "McMansions" of immense size and even modest-sized town houses and suburban homesteads with wall-to-wall conveniences. Residents live in them with electronic equipment and sumptuous meals while insensitive to the beggars at the door step. While the poor see food prices of their staples rise by fifty percent, America subsidizes turning one-quarter of our nation's corn into ethanol as biofuel to run our motorized guzzlers -- an abomination. As the world's poor are marginalized to ever greater degrees, our planet now has ten million millionaires and one thousand or more billionaires with numbers of these rising each year. The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization experts told us this past winter that meat production will double by 2050, two and a half times the rate of population increase. Many millions more Chinese, Indians and others are entering a middle class where the appetite for meat products has greatly expanded. Farm animals now take up seventy percent of farmland and consume one-third of the grain as animal feed -- to be turned into meat products. The rich consume three times as

much meat and four times as much dairy products as the poor.

Choices? We Jesuits, associates and visitors are committed to stand with Jesus; we ask ourselves in our heart of hearts exactly which side we are on. How are we to address these divisions that could result in exploding dissent and revolt as the divisions grow? Do we realize that the wealthy seek to defend their resources through broadening use of military force? Do our consciences bother us knowing that the commons belongs to all and yet is controlled and used by the privileged few? Choices are sometimes collective and not individual and must be seen as involving collective and individual wealth. Decree Three of the recent General Congregation says that *a political consequence of globalization has been the weakening of political sovereignty experienced by many nation-states all over the world.* Thus not even national governments in many areas can check the expanding influence of the wealthy; yet in an ideal democratic world the people are expected to control their own destinies.

Corporate wealth is often held by fictitious creations known as corporate "persons." Some of these corporations are larger and exert more power in economic terms than many of the nation states of Africa and elsewhere; they are able to influence, overpower and even help bring down governments; they can insist that they move their factories from one country to those of lower wages and weaker or no environmental regulations; they can tell us where and how much they will give in charity; and they encourage us to break our silence and dutifully thank them for their generosity. *Some states feel this phenomenon as a particular type of global marginalization and the loss of national respect.* (D. 3, n. 26) Dignity and respect are directed to God, fellow human beings (including the poor) and all creation. These corporations are not to be paid to stop polluting or to consider that they have a "right" to pollute. They must be taxed on their infringements on the common good; and, if they persist, their very right to exist should be questioned.

What are we to do in the face of such power? Pope Benedict calls us to renew our mission "*among the poor and for the poor.*" We believe that the Spirit inspires our ongoing work among and for the poor and that through our works we will be with the Lord. Our actions must go beyond mere charity (a first degree needed for salvation), or the solidarity with the poor through social actions (a second degree). Ultimately, we must be poor and use the ways of the poor to effect change, for God is on the side of the poor.

It becomes a question of belonging -- and resources belong to all.

The world's wealth and resources do not belong to a select few; they also belong to the poor. Pope Benedict XVI. Public Audience, September 5, 2007.

If resources needed to elevate the poor are present, then how must we proceed to make them available to the needy? How do

we bridge-builders follow the Spirit in our discernment in the light of shared commons, a precondition for reforming the social order and for healing our wounded Earth. Three ways are laid out in *Reclaiming the Commons: What Believers Can Do* on <www.earthhealing.info> and are condensed here:

Neo-Colonial Interpretation

The first approach to bridge-building is to persuade those with wealth to loosen their purse strings. This approach maximizes the freedom of the rich and appeals to moral issues of rejecting selfishness and assisting through charity. For our colleagues who have extensive contacts with people with business, banking and industrial expertise, efforts may pay off quite well.

Thus those fund-raisers may entice the religiously devout wealthy individuals to share from their bounty. This approach assumes a permanent division of the rich and poor. An option for the poor is unlocking the bounty of the wealthy so that the wealthy give from their largesse and thus receive a certain reward in doing so.

For those who take this approach, the mission of the one bearing Good News is to feed the poor from surpluses.

The anticipated bridge will be one of mutual affirmation and admiration, a resolution of conflict between the two classes, a new dawn in which the two classes find grounds to live in peace with each other. The poor may even be willing to emulate the rich and aspire to become good consumers and thus empower our current economy. This approach allows the rich to remain so but to give a reasonable portion of their wealth for the needs of the poor -- with the caveat that their own personal salvation depends on their being charitable. The twenty-first century economic nobility remains and its members continue to have the power to control and direct resources under their "stewardship" as they deem best.

The advantages of such an approach are that it makes use of our Christian (and perhaps Jesuit) influence and expertise in eliciting money from the largesse of the wealthy; it creates a bridge that is intended to be lasting; it does not threaten the economic or political systems as such; it challenges our abilities to extract charity from others and even to work for their salvation in the process -- even though we never see camels passing through the eye of a needle; and it anticipates that peons will be satisfied and less rebellious, if charity is distributed generously.

Disadvantages exist for a bridge of this design, and this is obvious to the more socially concerned. This bridge is a one-way street where the wealthy give and the poor dutifully receive and show gratitude; this type of bridge-building is an exercise in power by the rich as well as the bridge designers, for they both help perpetuate the current economic system; this process does

not involve justice but rather "charity"; it becomes a payoff for quieting the poor's discontent; the addicted or stingy rich person finds no need to give, for the process is laissez-faire at best; the idolatry of wealth goes unchallenged and we permit untaxed excessive wealth; and the system works on the assumption that addicted people (to consumer products) can rationally control their practices. Furthermore, the entire process is not based on Jesus' actions but on modern secular models.

A Revolutionary Interpretation

The second approach may seem more thrilling for those who are impatient with current global or national economic conditions. Here the bridge is constructed with the poor controlling the passage ways and willing to consider the taking of what is rightly theirs. The poor read the many passages of the Scriptures that deal with the favor of the Lord; they hear the words of Mary: *He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.*

The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away (Luke 2:52-53); they feel the justified anger when Jesus drives moneychangers from the temple saying, *My house is a house of prayer -- for all the people;* they are aware of being the people of God (the anawim), the ones with a destiny, the ones who are the majority once democracy begins to function.

Advantages of this type of bridge-building are that it can appeal directly to scriptural sources; it offers an opportunity for the wealthy to be liberated from what really does not belong to them -- and thus offers them (the rich) an opportunity to save their souls; it affirms that the fundamental option for the poor goes beyond charity and includes justice even if risks are involved in the process; it accepts the reality of some vulnerability in the confrontation involved; it affirms that the commons belongs to all the people; it demands the expertise of those who have worked on justice issues in the past; it considers that the initiation of the process comes from the poor and not the wealthy, and thus gives special meaning to a fundamental option; and it gives dignity to workers and others who no longer need to be charity cases.

Disadvantages can be found here as well. The constructed bridge is really a one-way structure that the thundering herds come across to take what is rightly theirs, and the rich must get out of the way or resist; it opens the possibility of undiscerning poor majorities turning to greed and the exercise of new-found absolute power (witness the French, Russian and Chinese revolutionaries at periods in history); it makes no provisions for the inexperienced taking resources, for such actions do not guarantee proper utilization or just redistribution. Lastly, the entire scenario is unrealistic, for the rich who currently control power structures would not allow such a bridge to be built without blowing it up and responding in a violent manner with little respect for anyone else.

In summary, both the neo-colonial and the revolutionary approaches are one-way bridges and involve only one part at the exclusion of the other. Spreading the Good News involves delivering a message from "church" teachings and tradition to others and distilling the richness of the target culture and taking it back to the established believing community. If Good News is a two-way span, certainly the bridges Jesuits help build are part of that process, not lugging resources across a one-way span from the rich to the poor, nor inciting the poor to cross over and take the tax havens of the wealthy by brute force.

The Two-Way Interpretation

The third approach to bridge-building, fair taxes, recognizes the complexity of the two other possible approaches. Bridges need resources from all parties (the resources of the wealthy and the democratic assent of the poor who are the democratic majority), for sustainable communities need cooperative efforts. Resources are present in untapped tax havens and coffers, namely, the **fourteen trillion** dollars now held in postage-stamp-size tax havens scattered throughout the world, the 300 billion dollars annually uncollected U.S. taxes, and higher fair taxes on the undertaxed super rich. For the greater part, workers are willing to work for their livelihood and do not want charity but the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution in their lives. The many willing migrants throughout the world prove this point.

Bringing together resources needed for change and workers as agents of change is what this bridge-building approach is all about. Respect for the poor includes supporting their right to work for a livelihood and the responsibility of the state to help protect that right. Respect for the commons means that what the wealth ought to be shared by all. A communication is required. It is not easy for the poor to enter the democratic process of securing fair taxes, but it can be done by getting rid of the myth of "no new taxes." Such a statement frees the rich from their responsibility and especially the wealthy who pay so little of their total economic worth. Taking through a democratic process demands effort, and giving up property -- even the commons belonging to all -- necessitates a surrender.

The heart of the bridge-building is that resources are gained by collective democratic processes of fair taxation in which all participate, as well as widespread ownership of the means of production. This two-way process will be unpopular but is the most non-violent, merciful and yet somewhat confrontational way to equalize resources. Private property has limits and the advocates for the poor need the courage to advocate for poverty issues of justice. This advocacy must be a controlled and not an emotional process, though justified anger helps launch justice programs for the poor. The approach rejects charity as a means to just redistribution of resources by the wealthy; equally it

rejects violent revolution as a means for redistribution.

Advantages to this third approach include:

* **Participation of all.** All parties are invited and required to participate, not on some sort of voluntary basis, nor from an emotionally charged revolutionary movement, but as part of involved citizenship. All have a duty to participate in democratic government and the enactment and enforcement of fair tax regulations for the common good. The expectation is that a universal regulatory body (the United Nations) will work to eliminate globally scattered so-called tax havens and assist in distributing resources to the needy.

* **Democratic process initiated by the poor.** The poor are seen as helping to raise the issue through voting for people who will show courage in requiring the collection of taxes from those who have had the benefit of tax loopholes. All have equal voice while realizing that the poor are the great majority. It should not be construed that the wealthy are like a "house of lords" with a vote equal to what the poor or the "house of commons." Wealth should give no extra vote nor confer nobility and privilege.

* **Role of special people.** Democracy demands leaders or catalysts from its ranks to inspire and encourage change. This is all the more reason for a deeper level of humility. The call from the leaders is for fair taxes; they must publicly and aggressively fight the media-controlled battle cry, "no new taxes." The leaders must make clear that the tax burden should fall more fairly on those who are the massive controllers of resources today than on the poor and lower-income taxpayers. Wealth must be redistributed.

* **National security.** The reclaiming of the commons by all the people will lower the need for national security measures and thus eventually release some of the trillion and a half dollars spent each year on defense forces and equipment. Real security comes with the betterment of the social order and the healing of the environment: infra-structure can be rebuilt; small farmers can get loans for seeds and fertilizers; agricultural and other access roads and railroads can be improved; irrigation systems and potable water supplies are to be provided; renewable energy projects can be launched and completed; and funds can be made available for proper health care, education and housing needs. The bridge builders are to build up the Kingdom of God.

The Call to Advocacy

We are called to do more than just discuss bridge-building techniques and goals; we are also to establish advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests. Here attention is turned from those with economic concerns to those with or desiring political power. The end result is the same -- building lasting

connections that improve the lot of the poor. If we opt for the third approach, namely fair taxation, we are opening individual and group advocates to ridicule since increasing taxes is highly unpopular. All too often our society works for self-interests, which support the right to own and control property in excessive amounts -- and the political influence to see that such holdings are retained and not threatened by taxation. A negative income tax (raising the income of those below the minimum needed to meet an adequate self-sufficiency standard) is to be part of a total fair tax system. To advocate the redistribution of wealth is tantamount to placing oneself among the radical fringe, who are to be discredited. Is this what we are called to be -- the radical fringe? What will our affluent providers think? How can we approach those who call us odd or out-of-step with their own society?

Advocacy means standing up to be counted. The needs of the poor are evident even though they have a paucity of advocates. In standing up we stand apart, for we confront a system that expects all to conform to some degree. When advocacy involves the poor, it is all the more vulnerable because of the inexperience of the clientele, their inability to articulate a coherent position and the lack of promotional resources. Raising taxes for the privileged (a progressive taxation on those who can afford to pay more) is not popular with those who control much of the mass media, namely the privileged who own the outlets. Interestingly enough, advocacy is an appeal for popularity even while the means of reaching immediate goals are often outside the control of the popularizers. Advocacy for the poor does not often involve movers and shakers of our society, but it ought to.

Advocates need a model. The potentially willing poor need to be identified and encouraged. Jesus speaks of the fields ready for the harvest but the laborers are few -- and this still applies today. Just as those willing to become advocates need to be perceptive in order to pinpoint potential leaders among the poor, so must advocates have courage in order to encourage. Part of that courage involves a firm belief that all, including a just future,⁰⁰ is possible. Within our faith we find we have as prophetic model and ultimate leaven of change -- Jesus himself. Furthermore, we have the tools for implementation in the sacramental life that Jesus established.

Advocates need a prophet. The advocate is the individual who finds a faith-enriching experience in calling upon Jesus and in following his approach to confrontation in numerous biblical accounts: approaching scribes and pharisees, driving money changers from the temple, defending John the Baptist, etc. Jesus has no institutional sponsors to whom he is indebted. Rather Jesus acts alone or in a small company of disciples; he trusts in the Father; he speaks forthrightly; he realizes the consequences. *The Spiritual Exercises* affords us a pathway to discerning how in this time and place we can strive to be advocates by following

Jesus the prophetic model. To do this we need to be drawn to the depth of his servant role as it touches the poor and marginalized.

We must recall the three degrees of humility. When it comes to advocacy for the poor, or those with a particular difficulty in voicing their own concerns, it takes more than educational degrees and issue-based experience. We need solidarity, and that is obtained by being willing to suffer with others. We do more than take a tour and see the poor through affluent eyes (a first level of humility); we do more than live in McMansions and talk about our concerns and even our work for the poor as distant and "other" (a second level of involvement); rather, we are called to become poor with Jesus in whose name we congregate, being vulnerable in our advocacy, with the clear hope that the rising of the lowly will triumph (the deepest level of humility).

Jesus is our model of compassion. In order to be such an advocate we look at the balanced personality of Jesus and meditate prayerfully on his life and work. Focusing on the person of Jesus, we suddenly see him in those who suffer in many ways -- the infirm, the elderly poor, the imprisoned, etc. This is Jesus who is crucified on Calvary, a place and event extending in space and time. Our sensitivity grows for those to whom we "belong" in an intimate family, the suffering brothers and sisters throughout the planet. We accept the vulnerability of the poor who often do not know exactly what the future will bring and who must depend on God and the goodness of others to survive. Yes, in some way we all are poor and that reality should only increase our compassion.

Jesus is our sacrament. Our nourishment or healthy disposition must be built up over time and this is achieved through the sacramental life, especially the Eucharist. Without God as food, we would be unable to complete the formidable work ahead. Our vocation calls for wholesome food with all the vitamins needed -- and only the Eucharist, the Bread of life, fulfills those requirements resulting from the immense difficulty of the task that faces us today.

Political leadership is from the grassroots. With Jesus as model advocate, we become a leaven in the dough of the world, the ones who are called to effect a rising of the powerless. Grassroots takes on its own characteristics, for plants start from tiny roots with the potential for penetrating more deeply over time. How can we obtain the resources needed for radical change or grassroots growth? One can hardly expect existing private or publicly funded institutions to be sources, since they are beholden to the more established funding sources -- to the wealthy for funds and approval. Institutional biases are often too great for honest dialog. Advocates must stand as free agents to some degree but not totally; they must spring from the grassroots and not be institutionally based (a point that the Congregation implicitly acknowledges while at other places extolling the merits of educational institutional bases). True grassroots movements

demand grassroots support.

The future belongs to the poor. In this world the poor are the great majority, and this is not always capitalized upon in democratically functioning societies. Some politicians are sensitive to the power of the voting poor but prefer to stand aloof. Lobbying by the poor is one way to break through such barriers; building grassroots programs and organizations demands special attention for identification and training of grassroots leadership is a time consuming and sometimes disappointing process. But it is necessary that we realize that even a small number who rise from the crowd may be worth the effort, for they can have a multiplying effect, if they prove their worth while catalyzing from within the grassroots itself.

Three levels of advocacy work. Once immersed in the culture of the poor, the advocate needs to distinguish ever more deepening levels to his or her calling. A first level is one of perception, of seeing what must be done and considering options; a deeper level is a growing sensitivity that permits the cultural nuances of the grassroots (its soil texture and climate) to be grasped and utilized in unique ways; the still deeper level involves applying cultural traits to problems through a variety of actions that are needed at this time. Note that many have the energy to be activist to some degree; others who are infirm need to offer their own suffering in union with the activities with which they are familiar.

Fair taxes is a legitimate advocacy issue. Today we live in a society that calls for lowering taxes either across the board or to lower income groups with various limits on the boundaries. What we advocate here is for the poor to work for the resources to tackle the problems that face us. If we do not have these resources, we must do more than await awards in charity or the fruits of revolution. We are called to enter the governmental process of a democratic society, not borrowing funds or accepting grants from an increasingly indebted society. Such funding is really exhausting the resources of their descendants.

What about money matters? As advocates we need to be quite critical about our income sources so that we are free to operate. To expect grants from foundations is somewhat far-fetched. The Internet has proved a source of income to some political candidates and perhaps could also work for a fair tax coalition that could tap the good will of a multitude of viewers. We will need to help justify the "redistribution of wealth" through proper and constitutional means and all the while be critical of excessive wealth whether by acquisition or, even more so, by retention. Excessive retained wealth becomes a tool of the status quo and will be used against any effort at redistribution. Taxes, legislated and enforced in collecting procedures, are the most just way to effect this redistribution and grassroots organizations geared to promoting fairer taxes must be supported

to the best of our ability as advocates for and with the poor.

Conclusion

This paper is meant to stimulate discussion by inspiring others who may see the issues from a different perspective. One must remember that this author has worked in the public interest arena for four decades. The 35th General Congregation introduced the element of advocacy into helping to solve the problem of disparity of wealth among rich and poor. Solutions to such problems may vary and yet each way when considered on its merits should help contribute to the emerging new order. Hopefully, this work will move others -- Jesuits, concerned associates, and all believers in the future -- to comment, elaborate, criticize and offer alternatives in building bridges between the rich and poor.

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Further Reflections on Bridge-Building

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General Congregation 35 (D.3, n.28) calls Jesuits to be bridge-builders "between rich and poor...between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests." Followers of Jesus and especially members of the Society of Jesus call to mind the sayings of Jesus: "Jesus looking hard at him, loved him, and said, 'One thing is lacking to you: whatever things you have, sell, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.'" (Mark 10:17-31) The young man goes away mourning because his possessions are great. The extent of his possessions blocks the message of Jesus from entering into him. He becomes paralyzed and cannot follow Jesus.

By our vow of poverty Jesuits are "free to share the life of the poor and to use whatever resources we may have, not for our own security and comfort, but for service." (General Congregation 32, D. 2, no. 20, *Constitutions and Complementary Norms* 143). We are free to listen to the poor, to analyze the structures which oppress them, and to envision new structures more in accord with God's Word. Although Jesuits should study past and present structures, not all of us can get doctorates in economics. All of us can see the structures that leave millions of human persons without the minimum essentials to live a decent life need revising. We need the spiritual freedom to imagine not a perfect world, but a better one, one more in accord with God's Word.

All Jesuits are formed by *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. During the Second Week Jesus invites us to follow him

in bringing about God's reign. Jesus' plan of action is quite different form that of Lucifer. Lucifer is surrounded by fire and smoke. The retreatant asks for insight "into the deceits of the evil leader and for help to guard myself against them." Lucifer's platform is riches, vain honor, surging pride. These lead to all other vices, a chasm between the wealthy and the poor, the economic and political power of a few. Jesus takes his place in that great plain near Jerusalem, in an area that is lowly and his appearance is beautiful and attractive. With God's grace we can be led to a peace with justice and an entirely new vision of community, solidarity, and democracy. Followers of Jesus receive their identity and self-worth not by climbing the ladder of "success," but by experiencing God's love. Solidarity with the poor may mean enduring misunderstanding even rejection. As Jesus did, many Jesuits have even suffered death as a result of their message of non-violence and justice.

In the Second Week of *The Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius sees people tempted to seek riches, and then because they possess some thing or things, they find themselves seeking the honor and esteem of the wealthy, the powerful and the ruthless. From such honor arises a false sense of identity in which false pride has its roots. So the strategy of the deceitful one is simple: riches -- these are mine; honor -- look at me; pride -- look who I am. By these three steps we are led to arrogance, conceit, a narrow closed mind, and then to all other vices. Upward mobility leads to a flight from the poor.

Jesus adopts a strategy just the opposite. Try to help people to grow and make their own decisions. Do not enslave or exploit them. Let go of riches and power. Be free to be true to yourself and open to receive the love and vision of jesus. Jesus followed downward mobility, from divine majesty to becoming a member of the human family. Jesus calls us to detachment from wealth and power and to attachment to people, especially the poor.

In *Unjust Desserts*, Gar Alperovitz shows that those who have more wealth than even they understand do not necessarily work harder. "All of us are given freely the technology of past generations. Why should only a few benefit disproportionately from the technology of the past?" "Share with your neighbor whatever you have, and do not say of anything, this is mine. If you both share in imperishable treasure, how much more must you share what is perishable. Never hesitate to give, and when you do give, never grumble, then you will know the One who will repay you." (Attributed to Barnabas, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, 71, 72)

One practical way to build bridges between rich and poor is by being patriotic and by educating and promoting the paying of taxes according to the principle of ability to pay. Jesuit high schools and universities can ask whether what they teach is an option for the poor or an option for the rich. Actually there should be no poor and no rich. All need not necessarily receive

the same amount, but each human person should have at least basic necessities and no human person should be able to dominate political or economic life. St. Thomas More in *Utopia* which builds on Plato's *Republic* says limits should be placed on wealth.

The 25th chapter of the book of *Leviticus* describes the Jubilee year during which wealth and property are redistributed. The earth is the Lord's. We are stewards' of God's creation.

Jesus says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." (Luke 20:25) Jesus did not reject the principle of taxation. St. Paul wrote to the community at Rome, "You pay taxes not only to escape punishment but also for the sake of conscience, magistrates being God's ministers who devote themselves to God's service with unremitting care. Pay each one his due; taxes to who taxes are due." (Romans 13: 6-7)

Closer to our day Pope Pius XII said, "There can be doubt concerning the duty of each citizen to bear a part of the public expense. But the state on its part, insofar as it is charged with protecting and promoting the common good of its citizens, is under an obligation to assess upon them only necessary levies, which are furthermore proportionate to their means." (*Pope Speaks* 3 (1957) 327). Pope John XXIII repeated this ethical standard, "As regards taxation, assessment according to ability to pay is fundamental to a just and equitable tax system." (*Mater et Magistra*, No, 132)

The United States Catholic Bishops reaffirm this principle: "The tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the public needs of society, especially to meet the basic needs of the poor. Secondly, the tax systems should be structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation. Action should be taken to reduce or offset the fact that most sales taxes and payroll taxes place a disproportionate burden on those with lower incomes. It's not simply that the wealthy should pay a greater amount but that they should pay at a higher rate of taxation. The goods of creation are to be shared by all God's people." (*Economic Justice for All*, No, 202)

The more assets one has, the bigger one's stake in the common good, and the more a person has to lose or gain. Those with more should be contributing more to the common good. Those with more should be contributing more to its well-being. Tax breaks are not so great a good to the affluent as it is an evil for lower-income people who must take up the slack or suffer decreased services.

I think that beyond a certain level of income many people strive more for power and prestige than for money. But even if progressive taxation does clip a bit the ambition of a few at the top, the effect would be to make power and decision-making more democratic and open up more opportunities for everyone to be creative and competitive. There would be a fresh influx of

inventiveness, ingenuity, and releasing of untapped potential. Moreover, mal-distribution of wealth and decision-making weakens solidarity and community. Scripture promotes community not selfishness; we are one human family.

The human person needs a certain minimum to pay for basic necessities. The more a family has above the basic minimum, the less its absolute need for it, and the higher the rate of taxation it can bear. The intent of progressive taxes is not to afflict the rich, but rather to put the tax burden where it will cause the least suffering. Taxes on furs and jewelry are fairer than taxes on food and basic medicine. Moreover, there is a floor below which we should not allow the human person to fall. Thus some have advocated a negative income tax in which those below the minimum are raised to an adequate income level.

A **regressive** tax occurs when the less a person has of the thing taxed, the higher the rate of payment. Sales taxes on necessities are greater rates of taxation on those with lower income and are regressive.

A **proportional** or flat tax is when everyone is taxed at the same rate without regard for means or ability to pay. This is equal but not equitable. It sounds good but doesn't bear up under careful analysis.

Although taxes will be much less because of the reduction in military expenditures, when we have a genuine democratic world federation, we will have a world tax system. Presently our foreign aid tends to be paternalistic and to be used as a political weapon. A tax should be levied on those who use the seas, the polar regions, terrestrial atmosphere and space. Our one Creator has made and destined all creation -- air, land, and sea, as well as human inventiveness -- for the whole human family, especially the poor and the oppressed. Indeed, in an age of technological abundance, I see no need for anyone to be poor or lack basic necessities.

Some feel tax laws are deliberately complicated and obscure to conceal what they really say. Politicians pretend to be for progressive taxation but in reality do not want to offend the sources of their campaign funding. Corporations and the wealthy have the best of both worlds. They appear publicly to be paying an exorbitant amount, but actually pay much less than their share.

If you owe me ten dollars, and I forgive five, I'm giving you five dollars. Tax breaks are subsidies. We subsidize corporations and often bail them out, but a few private individuals keep control and the profits.

Some critics of the present "welfare to the rich" say the capital gains preference is the greatest single source of tax reduction for the very wealthy. Only one in ten can benefit from

capital gains. It would be unfair to tax profits from investments in property held many years as if the profits were made in a single year, and taxes on long-term investments can be spread out, but the present tax-break for capital gains is way too much.

Economists insist that tax breaks are in the hundreds of billions of dollars and could greatly reduce the federal deficits. (For a further discussion see Mark Zepezauer & Arthur Naiman, *Take the Rich Off Welfare*). If I cancel a debt that you owe, in effect, I am giving you what I cancel. Such tax breaks are a form of welfare. Those who pay taxes are giving a part of their time and work to the common good. Even those who do not pay income taxes because they are part of religious communities, contribute a great deal of time and work to the common good. Taxes support schools, fire departments, the police, government, transportation, roads and bridges, parks, health, the environment and social security.

Taxes should only be assessed if necessary and according to ability to pay. Taxes should not be assessed without representation. Our limited democracy needs to be expanded so citizens can grow in courage and generosity. We need to educate concerning the waste of militarism and materialism.

Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit education can build bridges between those who have an excess and those who don't have enough. The Good News of the message of Jesus is that we can share with one another and be in solidarity with one another. By envisioning new structures, we can all live and grow together.

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