



Resolutions To Action

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US Impact on Global Economic Justice Through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching

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In the January 2008 issue of Resolutions to Action the authors from NETWORK laid out motivations, actions, and resources for the exercise of citizenship in preparation for the 2008 elections. The impact of our votes on global economic justice will be more indirect but no less critical. Using the pastoral cycle model this article will try to explain why.

EXPERIENCE

The presidential election campaigns are focused mainly on domestic issues such as the state of the economy, the housing crisis, and healthcare reform. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and global climate change are on the public radar screen, but unfortunately, few of the many other key global economic justice issues are.

However, the perspective of the next US president will be critical in the role our nation chooses to take in the world, and thus in the global impact of our nation's actions. Our experience of recent years has borne out how substantial are the effects of the worldview of the US president for global economic justice. Even though

our international influence is diminished, the size and economic girth of our country give us substantial weight and opportunity in the world. In the midst of a rapidly changing world, the question of how we will use that influence is an enormously significant one. The values that inform our leaders will determine what role we will take. As citizens we will help to choose the next president, so our perspectives on global economic justice issues, and those of people in our spheres of influence will be consequential. Hence the importance of expanding our own global vision and helping others to move from an all too common individualistic perspective to one grounded in a sense of the **global common good**.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

In-depth social analysis of US impact on global justice requires much more than is possible in this brief article.

A few questions will highlight some global economic justice issues in which US institutions and public policy have a significant role.

- **Millennium Development Goals:** Will the US keep its promises to foster the realization of these United Nations goals so significant to the world's poorest people?
- **Debt Relief:** Will the US use its influence to expand debt cancellation

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without harmful economic policy conditions to all countries that need it -- so that the \$100 million that is paid daily in debt service by poor countries can be invested in human needs instead?

- **Military Spending:** Will the US stop giving highest priority in its federal budgets to military spending, new nuclear weapons and war expenditures, fueling the global arms trade and the cycle of violence?
- **International Institutions:** Will the US be a supporter of more equitable representation in decision-making bodies of international organizations (United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund) than is the current one based on half-century-old power relationships?
- **Trade Relations:** Will the US representatives in the Doha Round of trade negotiations work to reduce agricultural subsidies for large US corporations so that farmers in poor countries can earn fair prices in trading their commodities?
- **Migration Policies:** Will the US develop and foster policies that treat economic migrants and political asylum seekers with dignity and enable them to contribute as well as earn their livelihood?
- **Human Trafficking:** Will the US take leadership in eliminating 21st century human slavery - labor bondage and sex slavery – affecting more people than ever before on the planet?
- **Global Climate Change:** Will the US collaborate in developing and implementing a new global treaty which effectively commits to lowering carbon emissions? Will the US government more fully foster

alternative energy sources and the lifestyle changes required?

These are but a few of the important global justice issues that will inexorably be influenced by the kind of leadership we elect in the United States. Attitudes of citizens will shape the effects the answers have in the rest of the world.

REFLECTION

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching give clear ethical guideposts for moral reflection on response to these issues. Johannes Metz reminded us that religious congregations are called to be the “dangerous memory” of what the imitation of Christ means in our world today. That means to call for societies in which the human dignity of every person is assured. It means to be co-responsible for the global common good. It means to recognize solidarity as the moral response to our interdependence, calling each of us to commit to work for the good of all and of each individual. It means to see the “other” as one to be made a “sharer on a par with ourselves in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited” to use John Paul II’s words (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39). It means to care for earth and to work for peace. It means to recognize that action for justice is a “constitutive dimension” of living the Gospel (*Justice in the World*, 6). It means to recognize that the economy exists for people, not that people are to be used for economic gain for others (*Economic Justice for All*, 1). And it means that we must always live in a spirit of hope. “Christians must embody in their lives the new creation while they labor under the weight of the old” (*EJA* 55). Our mandate is clear.

ACTION

- Continue to raise the significance of the social, of our co-responsibility for the common good. As Peter Henriot SJ put it: “Social justice means loving people so much that I work to change structures that violate their dignity.” Our call is to both give service and to work for social change. Exercising our citizenship is one way to do the latter.
 - Keeping ourselves and others well-informed is part of a new kind of asceticism, especially essential during the media blitz of a presidential campaign. Honing our faith-lens is an important part of developing well-informed consciences on social justice matters.
 - Consult recent resources to assist in global citizenship efforts.
 - ▶ www.maryknollogc.org/ US Elections 2008: Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.
 - ▶ “Applying Catholic Teaching to Major Issues” in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* 2007 publication of US Catholic Bishops. Part II the USSCCB policy positions – pp. 33-35 on Global Solidarity. www.usccbpublishing.org
 - ▶ E. Benjamin Skinner. “A World Enslaved”, *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2008), 62-67. www.coc.org/election2008/ Center of Concern, Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns and Georgetown have collaborated on in-depth tools framing election issues in context of globalization and Christian vision.
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