

Jesuit Forum **OPEN SPACE**

...Engaging the signs of the times...

November/December 2008

Getting beneath the debate

The Jesuit Forum brings together small groups of people from similar fields of social responsibility to participate in a process of deep dialogue.

The Forum process is an attempt to find some meaning in our confused and uncertain times.

The goal is to counteract the growing privatization of people's faith and deepest convictions and of speaking in public only what is politically correct.

The hope is that attentive listening and reflection will foster effective decision-making and action, influenced by the shared insights of the participants.

Artwork: Paul Schibli

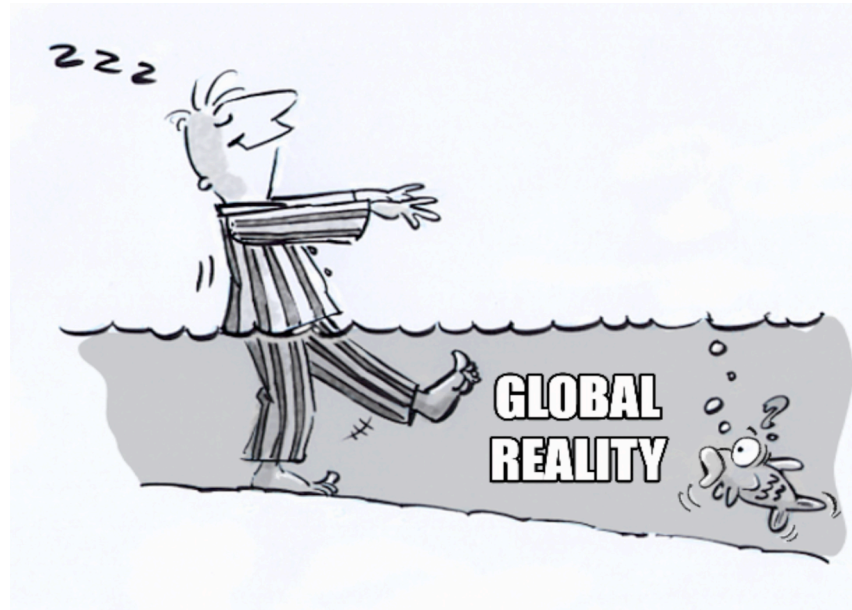
Greed

***came before the fall,
while the public guardians sleepwalked***

The ideological myth that a laissez-faire approach to free markets without government supervision guarantees the best possible public welfare dies hard. And it is the poor and the middle class who suffer most from its recurrent near-death pangs.

The authoritative weekly *The Economist* (September 28) published an analysis of the recent meltdown of the huge financial houses of Wall Street. It included statistics revealing that in the past decade, the financial service industry's share of total American corporate profits was 40% (up from 8% earlier) amounting to over 1.2 trillion dollars. The *Economist* calmly commented: ***“Those of us who have supported financial capitalism are open to the charge that the system we championed has merely enabled a few spivs to get rich.”***

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Greed *(continued)*

The facts of the situation are well known. Because of reduced (and, at some times and places, corrupt) government regulation, the financial system was able to create multi-billion dollars of junk credit, largely based on under-priced housing mortgages, and then package it with prime rate credit for sale in the global investment market – thus creating huge amounts of toxic securities. How could they do this? Largely because public authorities looked the other way, having become intimidated as the laissez-faire theory of market self-regulation grew larger than life. It had become, indeed, a powerful quasi-religious dogma, teaching that when individual and business greed are free from interference by government—and even from the social restraint that can come from widely shared convictions about the primacy of the common good—then the so-called “invisible hand” that operates in the unfettered market will bring the greatest economic growth and therefore the general welfare.

Demise of the social contract between business, labour and government

Under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the post-Second World War social contract that had aimed at full employment and had insisted on cooperation between business, labour and government was mocked and abandoned. Powerful forces of global capital mobility were unleashed. In that period, the seeds of the present financial meltdown were already sown.

The countervailing power of labour unions and the supervisory authority of elected governments were eroded. Increasingly, the financial share of the economy, embedded in the operations of huge corporations, became dominant, indeed overwhelming. Their CEOs were able at will to increase their own compensation astronomically, make big political contributions, and sue anyone who dared to challenge them. In every country in the world, the gap between rich and poor widened, while public authorities sleepwalked or went into denial even as they watched the financial credit bubble expand.

Over this period the influence of social ethics was greatly diminished. The hubris of technologism drained a great deal of humanity out of many sectors of public life: not only in economic decision-making but also in the management of health care, education, and ecological awareness, not to mention military calculations and international relations. The result was a kind of paralysis of human ethical concern and reflection. Indeed, it is the instrumental language of technical systems that now determines public policy in these areas.

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*Solidarity
is...
a firm and
persevering
determination
to commit
oneself to the
common good.
It is...squarely
opposed to
greed
and the thirst
for power.”*

Pope John Paul II
On Social Concern, 1987

First year report

Since our doors opened in October '07, we have led a series of experimental sessions. The results have confirmed the power of the Forum and we thank those who have offered us support, ideas, feedback and encouragement. We are especially grateful to our donors.

We continue to promote our process of authentic dialogue, which is about motivation and vision more than information. We are also planning other types of forums and activities.

It is clear that what we offer is counter-cultural and, for many people, is something very interesting and even important, but not urgent. Our approach is rather difficult to understand without the experience of a session.

However, we now have some excellent contacts in education, health, law, church, government, unions and we much appreciate the support we have been given in each area.

We are making inroads and our aim is to work with groups of people in different sectors of society in this process of engaging the signs of the times. We have called our newsletter **Open Space** to convey our intention to work more directly on the emerging justice issues of our time.

You are cordially invited to come to our workshop below...

Thank you, Loretto Sisters!

A very sincere thank you to Sr. Evanne Hunter, Sr. Margaret O'Keefe, Sr. Doryne Kirby and the Sisters at 70 St. Mary Street for their openness and warm welcome to the Jesuit Forum. We are very happy to have our offices in your building!

We much appreciate the kindness of Angela Convertini, Dean of Loretto College. We also want to thank Joe Grando, Alice Gomes, Fe Gavina and all the wonderful staff at Loretto College.

ENGAGING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

A workshop

*with Peter Bisson sj, Bill Ryan sj,
and Anne-Marie Jackson*

Tuesday, December 9, 6.30-9.30 pm

70 St. Mary Street, Toronto \$30/\$15 students

Please register at amjackson@jesuitforum.ca



Paul Schibli

"Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone."

John Maynard
Keynes

Greed (continued)

There are voices crying "Enough"!

One example: the economist John Ikerd is a late convert from neoclassical free-market capitalism. He would replace the present frenzy with a new vision, that of *Sustainable Capitalism: A Matter of Common Sense*, the title of his new book. He sees today's capitalism as cancerous, having lost its internal social and moral controls, having escaped any external effort to restrain and moderate its relentless growth. "Sustainable capitalism" requires an ecological worldview, not a mechanistic one. Ikerd writes,

"(It) requires a holistic approach to science, a deep approach to ecology which values both the importance and rightness of relationship among all living things, including humans, and between the living and non-living elements of the biosphere. Sustainable capitalism requires a self-renewing, regenerative paradigm of development. But the transition to a sustainable form of capitalism begins with a change of worldview... (which means it) begins in the hearts and minds of people."

We can dare to hope, and we can pray that the shock of the present financial meltdown will be powerful enough to help our leaders— and ourselves— remember that human society can only be sustained when inter-human trust and solidarity are sustained. Mutual respect, concern and trust are consonant with our social human nature. We undo the bonds and structures of conviviality between labour, business and government at our own peril – and that of the Earth.

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Greed (continued)

The duty of serving the common good is at the heart of Catholic social teaching; it is also at the heart of all true ethics, and should be at the nerve centre of economic planning, whether by workers, entrepreneurs, investors or governments.

New vision requires hard thinking as well as deep compassion. Let me strongly recommend three recent books that develop many of the themes I have touched on here. The books are: **Naomi Klein's** [The Shock Doctrine—The Rise of Disaster Capitalism](#); **James Galbraith's** [The Predator State: How Conservatives Abandoned the Free Market and Why Liberals Should Too](#); and **Lawrence Schmidt's** [The End of Ethics in a Technological Society](#).

Bill Ryan sj
Assistant Director
Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice

Brazilian Prayer of Communion

O Jesus, you are the bread of those who are excluded.

We come here in communion with the struggle of the suffering poor

Who want to have their voice, their turn to speak and their place.

This communion is dangerous; it may convert us, make us uncomfortable

But we accept this challenge in unity and faith;

Our steps will one day change the world!

Refrain from a song heard at the CIDSE Mass opening the Fifth World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil 2005

You are warmly invited to celebrate
the new shared offices of:

Canadian Jesuits International (CJI)
&
Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice



Loretto College, 70 St. Mary Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J3

Kindly RSVP: 416-465-1824 cji@jesuits.org or
416-927-7887 amjackson@jesuitforum.ca

Justice in the 21st century: Reconciling dialogue



The Jesuit Forum offers one way to put into practice Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz' proposal for reconciliation as justice (see adjacent).

The authentic dialogue we are promoting fosters listening and a way to find common bonds and actions.

It turns problem-solving on its head and focuses on meaning and motivation.

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz was born and raised in La Habana, Cuba. She is a professor of ethics and theology and is writing a book on justice as an act of reconciliation rooted in care and tenderness. The following is taken from a recent talk, the Theresa Dease Lecture in Toronto.

All involved have to recognize that the process of reconciliation has to be guided by a true sense of dialogue, that it is not a matter of convincing the other that she is wrong or to win him to one's side but of moving jointly to a place we create together....

Finally, we need a mystique of reconciliation. A mystique is an intangible force that enables those who embrace it to face all reality. It refers to an understanding that provides a social cohesion that enables participants to do what they have not been able to do individually, but that becomes possible when one participates in a shared experience.

A mystique of reconciliation, therefore, makes possible, in even the most adverse of circumstances, to practise the virtue of reconciliation. A mystique of reconciliation provides for us the strength we might not have individually to struggle against the forces that divide us, to commit ourselves to building together a common future in which we can all be invested.

A mystique of reconciliation will make it possible for us to remain open to the dreams and hopes of the people, to the desires and expectations of the most vulnerable, of those most in need.

A mystique of reconciliation makes the struggle possible. It gives us fuerzas para la lucha – making it possible to move ahead, to be people of vision, to create a common future.

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