

INTERCONNECTION

Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Newsletter
Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph, USA



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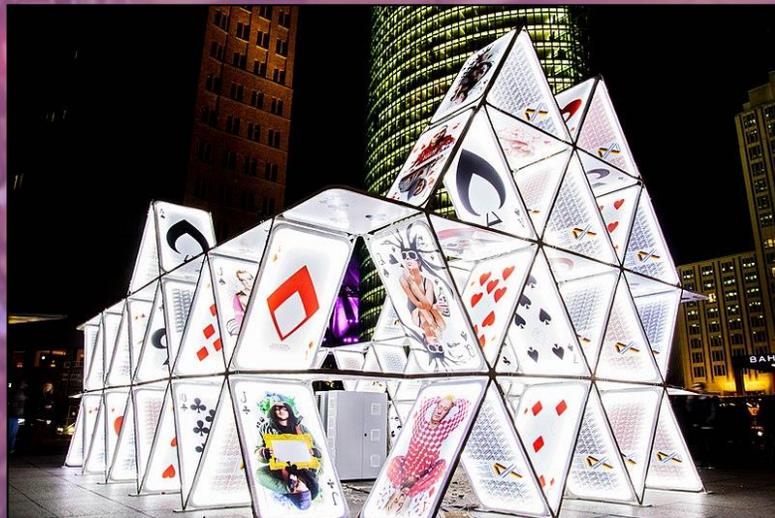
HOUSE OF CARDS?

By John Celichowski, OFM Cap.

According to many measures, our economy here in the United States is the strongest it has been in many years. Incomes are generally rising. The unemployment rate is near the level of what many economists consider “full employment.” Until a very sobering October and November, our stock markets were in record territory. Because of stronger employment, higher incomes and lower gas prices, more people traveled this past Thanksgiving Weekend than at any time in over a decade.

Yet there are also some clouds on the horizon. Home prices are stagnant or dropping in some parts of the country, while in others—particularly in many large urban areas like Chicago—they are rising so high that even average homes are becoming unaffordable. The income and wealth gaps between the richest of our brothers and sisters and the rest of us continue to grow.

Another issue—certainly underreported—is our looming tsunami of debt. Our federal debt is now nearly \$22 trillion—more than 10 times that of China. Interest payments on this debt are now the fourth-largest component of the federal government budget, exceeded only by Social Security, the U.S. military, Medicare and Medicaid.



Festival of Lights in Potsdammer Platz, Berlin
photo by [poorpeschino](#), CC 2.0 license

Those who say that the government should be run with the same penny-pinching efficiency as our households or businesses may want to think again. Consumer debt is well over \$13 trillion—not counting what people charged to their credit cards on Black Friday and Cyber Monday! Corporate debt exceeds \$9 trillion. In an economy in which two-thirds of our Gross Domestic Product (the total value of all that our people and businesses produce) is generated by personal consumption, it is difficult to imagine how much longer we can sustain the inverse of our Capuchin maxim: “the maximum allowed, not the minimum necessary.”

We could well be building a \$44 trillion house of cards.

PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A MORAL ECONOMY



photo by [National Farm Workers Ministry](#), CC 2.0 license

There are many measures that can be used to determine how healthy an economy is: a steadily and sustainable growth in GDP, low unemployment, increased income and wealth, fewer disparities, a budget “in the black,” a positive balance sheet.

But how do we determine how *moral* an economy is?

Over 20 years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) established a set of [ten principles](#) for evaluating the ethical efficacy of an economy. As you read, watch or listen to the news and evaluate what is reported and what our elected officials and other policy makers are saying, think of the following (slightly rephrased):

1. The economy exists for the person, not the other way around.
2. Economic life, our choices and our institutions should be shaped by moral principles, e.g. human life and dignity, support for family life, and the common good.
3. A fundamental measure of any economy is how well it responds to the needs of its poorest and most vulnerable members.

4. All people have a fundamental right to life and the things that are needed to sustain it: adequate food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, etc.
5. All people have basic rights as economic actors: economic initiative, productive work, just wages and benefits, decent working conditions and the right to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. Just as people have a host of economic rights, they also have (according to their capacities) some corresponding obligations: to work, to provide for the needs of their families, and to contribute to the wider society.
7. Free markets have advantages and disadvantages; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; and voluntary groups have indispensable roles but can't replace the proper working of markets or the just policies of the government.
8. Society has a moral obligation to assure economic opportunity, meet basic human needs and pursue economic justice. At times this may require governmental action.
9. All of us—workers, managers, customers, stockholders—are moral as well as economic agents. By our choices we can enhance or inhibit economic opportunity, community life and social justice.
10. We live in a global economy. We need to consider that our decisions on investment, trade, aid and development have moral dimensions and human consequences.

USCCB Justice for Immigrants Conference

By Robert Wotypka, OFM Cap.

Moses was an unaccompanied minor. In his youth Jesus of Nazareth was a refugee. And when he became man and entered into God's plan of salvation, as Simeon foretold ("Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted" [Lk 2: 34]), his execution happened as it did because of his "status." What he experienced at the hands of the state would not have happened had he been a Roman citizen. These are not original insights (but, you know, keep reading ...?), rather, they have been brought to the forefront of my consciousness through the words and wisdom of my brothers and sisters who are living out our common call to welcome and to care for the strangers among us. But first, a word from our sponsor:



MIGRANTS
REFUGEES

www.migrants-refugees.va

3:38 / 3:42

Father Robert Stark, a priest of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, introduced this video at the Justice for Immigrants conference sponsored by the

USCCB, where Brother John Celichowski and I attended December 5-7 in D.C. Its message arose from the work of the [Vatican office on Migrants and Refugees](#). Once our eyes were dry he explained that the work of this Vatican section was foundational in the creation of the [United Nations Global Compact on Migration](#). The conference attendees prepared to bring these understandings, these Gospel values, to our representatives on Capitol Hill. About that, please see [this post](#) as it is the final installment of three about our time in D.C.

My faith, as I understand it, is not to be driven by polls. I don't seek them out, I don't avoid them, and I understand their role in policy-making. I am not a betting friar and therefore am not tempted to play the odds. That said, recall that when the current administration instituted its short-lived zero-tolerance and child separation policy for people arriving at the US southern border, it did not "poll well". And it was altered, though government agencies are still struggling to deal with the surge of families arriving from Central America, even as our brothers and especially [our sisters](#) are committing whatever resources they can to respond. Still - why bring this up? Why talk about such a controversial issue?

Well, as the kids say - yeah, no. It's not controversial. I beg you, dear reader, re-watch the video. Is there anything controversial in it? Does Pope Francis say anything contrary to the Gospel or to the example of Jesus, who he has called "the face of God's mercy"?

[Read full story here.](#)

Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph JPIC Commission.

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