

Poverty, inequality and Pope Francis

Tony Magliano | May. 26, 2014 Making a Difference

Just think about it. [According to the United Nations](#) [1], approximately 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty throughout the world. Clean water and sanitation, adequate nutritious food, a safe job with fair pay, an education, medical care, and a decent place to call home are unfulfilled dreams to these brothers and sisters of ours.

Every day, they must somehow find a way to survive on less than \$1.25. Even in the poorest countries, it is almost impossible to live on this meager amount. And in fact, many do not make it.

Every day, approximately 21,000 fellow human beings die from hunger and hunger-related diseases. And [according to the United Nations Children's Fund](#) [2], some 300 million children go to bed hungry every night.

[According to the Christian anti-poverty organization Bread for the World](#) [3], more than 48 million Americans -- including 15.9 million children -- do not have enough nutritious food to eat. And more than one in five children live in poverty.

Yet earlier this year, [Congress cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) [4] for poor Americans by \$8 billion over a 10-year period. Reportedly, this will reduce food budgets for affected households by about \$90 per month. That's a big cut for low-income families.

[Bread for the World is concerned](#) [5] that a Coast Guard reauthorization bill recently passed by the House -- including a provision that would require 75 percent of all U.S. food aid to be shipped on U.S. vessels -- may be passed by the Senate. In order to pay for this expensive shipping provision, funds allocated for food purchases would be reduced, thus endangering 2 million hungry people.

Please email and call (Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121) your two U.S. senators and urge them to oppose this provision and instead support legislation that would allow local and regional food purchases near the site of a humanitarian crisis or development project.

In a [May 9 meeting at the Vatican](#) [6] with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Pope Francis urged world leaders to commit to building a much more level playing field between the wealthy and the poor.

The pope encouraged world leaders to challenge "all forms of injustice" and resist the "economy of exclusion," the "throwaway culture," and the "culture of death," which "sadly risk becoming passively accepted."

Championing the cause for income equality, the pope called for "the legitimate redistribution of economic benefits by the state."

But most politicians and wealthy persons in the U.S., and throughout much of the world, are strongly opposed to any "legitimate redistribution of economic benefits by the State."

In an opinion piece for *The New York Times* headlined "[Inequality Is Holding Back the Recovery](#) [7]," Joseph E.

Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, shared his deep concern regarding the growing divide between the top 1 percent and the rest of us:

Instead of pouring money into the banks, [the Obama administration] could have tried rebuilding the economy from the bottom up. ... We could have recognized that when young people are jobless, their skills atrophy.

We could have made sure that every young person was either in school, in a training program or on a job. Instead, we let youth unemployment rise to twice the national average. ...

President George W. Bush's steep tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 and his multitrillion-dollar wars in Iraq and Afghanistan emptied the piggy bank while exacerbating the great divide.

Stiglitz wrote that Bush's party's "newfound commitment to fiscal discipline -- in the form of insisting on low taxes for the rich while slashing services for the poor -- is the height of hypocrisy."

Shortly after his election, [Pope Francis said](#) [8] to a gathering of some 5,000 journalists, "How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor."

Yes, indeed. For if a more humble, more simple-living church doesn't stand firmly with the poor, then who will?

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Links:

[1] <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>

[2] <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/poverty.html>

[3] <http://www.bread.org/hunger/us/facts.html>

[4] <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/republicans-won-food-stamps-farm-bill>

[5] <http://blog.bread.org/2014/04/house-passed-coast-guard-bill-reduces-impact-of-us-food-aid.html>

[6] <http://www.news.va/en/news/the-pope-to-the-united-nations-executive-board-cha>

[7] http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/19/inequality-is-holding-back-the-recovery/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

[8] <http://ncronline.org/node/47741>

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