

especially as they are built into our collective life. An anti-poverty strategy, for example, without an "anti-Mammon" program cannot succeed. "Mammon is a cosmic power that organizes itself into principalities and powers, creating inequalities and injustices among human beings. The battle has to be fought also at the macro-ethical level of systems and ideologies in politics and economics. We are dealing here with a human compulsion to institutionalize human greed at the cost of human fellowship." 8

In an article entitled "The Death of Horatio Alger," Paul Krugman, discussing the Congressional Budget Office report on historic U.S. tax rates, writes: "...between 1973 and 2000 the average real income of the bottom 90 percent of American taxpayers actually fell by 7 percent. Meanwhile, the income of the top 1 percent rose by 148 percent, the income of the top 0.1 percent rose by 343 percent and the income of the top 0.01 percent rose 599 percent."9

This inequality is increasing in the most favored society in the world, whose comparative advantage over the rest of the world has been kept artificially high by military force, aid to repressive regimes, selective observation of international law, and control of raw resources and international trade and investment programs.

Discussing the United Nations Development Report for 1998, David Loy comments:

"...twenty percent of the global population now accounts for 86 percent of consumption; the three richest people on the planet have assets that exceed the com-

bined GNP of the 48 poorest countries. The result is that three-fifths of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries lack basic sanitation, one-third have no safe drinking water, one-quarter are inadequately housed, one-fifth undernourished and one-fifth lack access to modern health services. This continuing catastrophe is partially due to the fact that in 'undeveloped' countries it is the powerful and wealthy classes that continue to benefit most from the efforts of development agencies such as the World Bank; and when projects fail, as many do, it is the poor that suffer the most from their failure."10

Later in the same article, he quotes from the report: "It is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all, adequate food care for all and safe water and sanitation for all is roughly \$40 billion a year....This is less than 4 percent of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world." 11

When U.S. hyper-power no longer exists to enforce such global inequity, truly the consequences of our failure to address the wealth-poverty problem will come home with a vengeance. For the poor, there is no solution to their problem without a cure for the appetites and delusions of the rich.

In a chapter entitled "Work and Wealth," Giovanni Baldelli, points out: "Without the notion of a general order, of a whole fabric in which no constituent part can be damaged or offended without damage or offense to the whole, the notion of right falls to the ground and there is nothing beyond monadic interests

and power to satisfy them, there is no authority to which to appeal..."12

This same understanding of the interdependence of existence suffuses many of the world's wisdom traditions, including a number of texts written over 2500 years ago, that touch on the nature of a just and stable society. The sutra on the "Wheel Turning Ruler" described a monarch who had forgotten the injunction to make provision for the poor. This had led to crime and to attempts to quell it, including capital punishment:

*Hearing about this, people thought: "Now let us get sharp swords made for us, and then we can take from anybody what is not given, we will make an end of them, finish them off once and for all and cut off their heads." So, having procured some sharp swords, they launched murderous assaults on villages, towns and cities, and went in for highway-robbery, killing their victims by cutting off their heads.* 13

*Thus, from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased...* 13

In a sutra from the same era, also regarding the right conduct of government, the monarch is advised of the rightness of maintaining the social contract:

*"To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fod-*

*der; to those in trade, give capital; to those in government service assign proper living wages. Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty's revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves, and the people, with joy in their hearts, will play with their children, and will dwell in open houses."*14

Egalitarian in its shape, the wheel is a model of the right form of community improvement. Its structure is such that its strength comes from the mutually reinforcing and interdependent nature of its parts, all of which converge at the center. It has no top or bottom. Human beings – self-organizing creatures, capable of great mutual aid and mutual uplift, even in circumstances of deprivation – work from the ground up to encourage "organic leaders" and foster sound and just human communities. It is as permanent a form of change as is possible in a world of impermanence. As besides, it is the right thing to do.

- [1] [3] "In Jesus, God has become my poor neighbour," Sunday Times of Sri Lanka, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/021222/plus/8.html>
- [2] in Watts, Jonathan, Senauke, Alan, and Bhikkhu, Santikaro (ed.), *Entering the Realm of Reality: Towards Dhammic Societies* (Bangkok: INEB, 1997), p. 85.
- [4] [10] [11] Loy, David R., "Buddhism and Poverty," [http://www.wfdd.org.uk/articles\\_talks/loay.pdf](http://www.wfdd.org.uk/articles_talks/loay.pdf).
- [5] Pieris, Aloysius, "The Asian Sense in Theology," in *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p.86.
- [6] Bhikkhu, Santikaro, "The Four Nobles Truths of Dhammic Socialism," in Watts, et. al., op. cit., pp. 97 -114.
- [7] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering* (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti, 2000, p. 31.
- [8] Pieris, Aloysius, "The Buddhist Political Vision," in *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 91
- [9] Krugman, Paul, "The Death of Horatio Alger," *The Nation* online, <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20040105&s=krugman>
- [12] Baldelli, Giovanni, *Social Anarchism*, Chapter 6, "Work and Wealth," (Chi/NY, Aldine-Atherton, 1971), pp. 110.
- [13] Cakkavatti Sihan da Sutta, *Digha-Nikaya iii 66-68*; in Maurice Walshe (tr.), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995)
- [14] K tadanta Sutta, *Digha Nikaya, I 135 - 136 (136)*; *ibid.*. See also the *Aggañña Sutta*, pp. 407 - 415 of the same volume.

