

Catholic Social Teaching

Caesar's renderings need a prayerful view

BY **STEVE VOYTOWICH**
GUEST COLUMNIST

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." This passage from Matthew's Gospel was for most of us our first religious insight into taxes, while our initial social exposure was listening to our parents as they sat around the dinner table worrying about the April deadline. Eventually, there was the real life experience of wondering where the fruits of our labor disappeared upon receipt of our first paycheck. As we grew in our faith, we realized that paying taxes was a serious responsibility ripe with potential consequences.

Though Jesus' saying may be the most familiar biblical reference to taxes, there are actually several references. Exodus 30:11-16 and 2 Chronicles 24:12-14 speak of taxes providing security and payment to workers; and the ethical obligation to strict compliance of paying taxes is found in Romans 13:1-2, Titus 3:1, and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

Over the centuries, as Christian values prospered, collection and distribution of taxes evolved to include

helping the poor and disadvantaged, based on the Catholic Church's understanding of a preference for the poor and vulnerable. While the temporal, concept of taxes is a social contract with

the principles of solidarity, equality and making use of talents. It must also pay greater attention to families, designating an adequate amount of resources for this purpose."

As special, primary, and general elections play out this year, our civic and religious duty is to learn the candidates' positions on taxes.

deadlines, statistics, and enforcement, the Catholic response is a more personal covenant we have with our fellow citizens to ensure that all are respected and cared for as a human being, made in the image and likeness of God.

The "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace states, "Just, efficient and effective public financing will have very positive effects on the economy, because it will encourage employment growth and sustain business and non-profit activities and help to increase the credibility of the State as the guarantor of systems of social insurance and protection." It goes on to say, "In the redistribution of resources, public spending must observe

burdens all in society with increased public debt. The social contract and Christian covenant is a promise to pay our fair share.

Learning about taxes, which are obtuse and complicated, is an exasperating endeavor. With so many daily responsibilities, finding time to research sources that bring to light Christian beliefs can be difficult. There are two groups who provide information on taxes, especially as they relate to care for the poor and vulnerable: Texas Impact, an ecumenical lobbying group, at www.texasimpact.com and the Center for Public Policy Priorities at www.cccp.org. As special, primary, and general elections play out this year, our civic and religious duty is to learn the candidates' positions on taxes. Go to their Web site, phone their office and seek information. You might receive an enlightening response. Most importantly, as you do so, remember that our

Catholic perspective is one that is not based solely on self interest, but on what is best for all, especially those least able to care for or speak for themselves.

Steve Voytowich is a member of the Diocesan Faithful Citizenship Committee and parishioner at St. Catherine Parish in Austin.

A civilized country depends on taxation for opportunity and to ensure democracy. In the past, taxpayers made wise investments for the future by funding the interstate highway system, the Internet, and the medical, scientific, communication, and airline establishments. Other institutions created and maintained by taxes include the banking system, the Treasury and Commerce Departments, the Federal Reserve, and the judicial system. All who benefit must be willing to participate in a system of taxation. Only this makes such a system fair for all.

This leads to our obligation as Catholic Christians not to underreport income or claim false deductions. Tax evasion cheats those who are honest and