

The Tax Justice Network on Radio 4's Thought for the Da...

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TJN was mentioned - and its philosophy endorsed - on BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day this morning, given by Richard Harries, Baron Harries of Pentregarth.

[You can listen again here.](#) It starts at 1:48 in.

The transcript is as follows (thanks to John for supplying it):

Good Morning.

Sometimes when addressing audiences, I remark that the English are not obviously observant about their religion, but they do claim one very important quality: a deep-seated sense of fair play.

That sense of fairness has surfaced again this week over the question of whether a number of international companies are paying the right amount of corporation tax. Starbucks, for example, are due to be questioned by MPs about this. What these companies do is perfectly legal. The question is whether it's fair.

That's the question which organisations like Tax Justice Network rightly raise, and that's the question we all face, personally as well as politically.

Tax to most of us of course seems a burden; something which is imposed and which we pay with a groan. In fact, however, much of our tax goes to pay for what we actually receive.

As I collect my paper in the morning I have a cheery "Good Morning" exchange with the man sweeping up the leaves now falling fast from the trees and lying damp on the pavement. That service is of course paid for out of Council Tax, but there are other elements of our tax which don't benefit us personally; but which express the fact that as a society we have certain values.

Perhaps, in our most charitable moments, we would be willing to contribute personally to pay carers to look after all those frail elderly who are unknown to us. But, those

moments are very, very, few. What taxation ensures for us is that what we might for others will in our highest moments, actually happens: whether we feel like it or not.

Whatever the charitable impulses of us as individuals, it is through our taxation system that we express what we want to be as a society: civilised and humane. Grumble about it as we might, taxation is a sign of social solidarity.

From a Christian point of view I want to say more: that this is rooted in a sense that we really do belong together: as part of one human community of mutual giving and receiving under God.

This is not to deny the fierce disagreements about what is fair, or how to achieve that fairness, but the point is that this a value which is part of all of us, except the most morally blind; and we ought to be able to build on that for some degree of consensus

Life, people always tell us, always is unfair. Sadly it is indeed, but it is part of the human spirit that we feel it ought not to be, and that we ought to do what we can to make it fairer.

A friend once said to me that he had brought up his children to believe that when they paid tax they should be grateful that they have made enough money to do so. I found that rather salutary.