

# Jubilee Workbook VI

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September 2004

Ross and Gloria Kinsler, authors of *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life: An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesial, and Social Transformation* (Orbis Books: 1999), are members of the **Sabbath Economics Collaborative** ([www.sabbatheconomics.org](http://www.sabbatheconomics.org)).

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## TODAY'S WORLD

### THE WAL-MART CHALLENGE

Wal-Mart is the world's largest and most powerful retail corporation – with \$259 billion in annual business, 1.2 million employees, and a presence that dominates its competitors and is emulated by others. Wal-Mart's "success" is directly related to employment policies that eliminate unions and leave workers with low salaries and minimal benefits. Wal-Mart has become the model and epitome of capitalism.

In her article, "Will Labor Take the Wal-Mart Challenge?" (*The Nation*, June 28, 2004, pp. 11-17), Liza Featherstone analyzes the Wal-Mart business model, which has earned it top place among the Fortune 500 for the last three years. The basic commitment of Wal-Mart is simply to offer the cheapest products, which attracts the most consumers. Employees earn an average of \$8 an hour, a health plan that leaves out most, who in turn "depend on the government to pay their medical bills." So, as Wal-Mart continues to expand its empire rapidly with massive new Supercenters adding groceries to its earlier commodities, competitors are beginning to cut back salaries and benefits as necessary to stay in business.

To keep its workers in line, Wal-Mart maintains a tight control on worker organizing. A Wal-Mart manual explicitly instructs management at all levels to resist any attempts to organize a union, even to the point of screening applicants for suspicious traits or histories and requiring them to sign forms indicating that they will not support any effort to unionize the store – "a clear violation of federal law." Wal-Mart does not hesitate to break the law in order to stay union-free. . . . Wal-Mart has been found guilty of many violations of workers' right to organize, even firing union sympathizers." The fines they have to pay are "simply part of the cost of doing business, a small price to pay for keeping unions out." Now Wal-Mart faces a massive class action suit for gender discrimination.

Because of its size and success Wal-Mart has become an enormous challenge to the entire labor movement and the entire progressive movement, which "will have to make the unionization of Wal-Mart a priority." Across the country campaigns have arisen to protect local businesses and local cultural values as well as worker rights. What is needed is to convince the public that cheap prices are ultimately not their only interest but rather may be superseded by economic justice, the lives of workers and their families, and the well-being of society as a whole. At stake is the soul of capitalism, which appeals so effectively to the selfish interest of consumers, workers who desperately need employment, managers, and investors seeking ever greater profits. Without a widespread conversion of values, Wal-Mart will continue to grow; competitors and business in general will follow Wal-Mart's lead, workers will continue to be powerless and exploited, and U.S. culture will become even more individualistic and fractured.

**1. What is the spiritual nature of the Wal-Mart challenge? What is our responsibility to Wal-Mart workers and their families?**

**2. What is the international impact of the Wal-Mart way of doing business?**

## THE HIJACKING OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY

Vandana Shiva, the author of *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (South End Press, 2000), is a leader of the International Forum on Globalization and the director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Natural Resource Policy. She unveils the enormous impact of corporate agriculture on farmers and fishers, on the food security and culture of millions, and on the environment – especially in her native India, where 75 percent of the population lives from agriculture.

*This phenomenon of the stolen harvest is not unique to India. It is being experienced in every society, as small farms and small farmers are pushed to extinction, as monocultures replace biodiverse crops, as farming is transformed from the production of nourishing and diverse foods into the creation of markets for genetically engineered seeds, herbicides, and pesticides. As farmers are transformed from producers into consumers of corporate-patented agricultural products, as markets are destroyed locally and nationally but expanded globally, the myth of “free trade” and the global economy becomes a means for the rich to rob the poor of their right to food and even their right to life. For the vast majority of the world’s people –70 percent – earn their livelihood by producing food. The majority of these farmers are women. In contrast, in the industrialized countries, only 2 percent of the people are farmers. (7)*

Over millennia Indian farmers have developed 200,000 varieties of rice and openly share seeds. “Today corporations control 32 percent of the global commercial-seed market, valued at \$23 billion, and 100 percent of the market for genetically engineered, or transgenic, seeds.”(9) These corporations dominate world trade, imposing policies driven by financial interests through the WTO and the “free market.” When the local mustard-oil supply was “mysteriously adulterated” in India, for example, the government banned local processing and brought in packaged soybean oil, replacing the work of innumerable local processors and local farmers and eliminating the preferred, cheaper cooking oil. “Every agency of government in the United States and India is being used by the soybean lobby to destroy agricultural and food diversity in order to spread the soybean monoculture.”(27)

“Soy imperialism” is facilitated by the concentration of grain trade through a very small number of corporations. Cargill and Continental each controls 25% of global grain trade. The U.S. is the biggest soy producer using 18 million hectares and producing 74.2 million metric tons of genetically engineered soybeans in 1997. The corporations profit from the annual sale of seeds, from the heavy investment in agrochemicals and pesticides they require, and from trade, all of which they monopolize.

Vandana Shiva provides ample information about corporate impact on other agricultural sectors, which amounts to the theft of local farming and of nature’s abundance, all in the name of profits for the rich at the expense of the world’s hungry poor.

**Consider the issues raised by this author in light of global poverty and hunger.**

## FREE TRADE IS UNFAIR TRADE – MEXICO

Michael Pollan offers a remarkable analysis of free trade's affect on Mexico's small farmers and ecology in his *L.A. Times* article (B13, April 23, 2004), "A Flood of U.S. Corn Rips at Mexico." The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) implanted in 1994 has opened Mexico to U.S. farmers, "who are now selling millions of bushels of corn south of the border." Subsidized by our taxes, U.S. agribusiness can sell this corn at prices below its own cost of production and below the cost of production for small Mexican farmers, forcing 1.3 million off the land, "swelling pools of Mexico's urban unemployed" and sending others across the border to low-paying jobs here.

*The cheap U.S. corn has also wreaked havoc on Mexico's land, according to the Carnegie report. The small farmers forced off their land often sell out to larger farmers who grow for export, farmers who must adopt far more industrial (and especially chemical- and water-intensive) practices to compete in the international marketplace. Fertilizer runoff into the Sea of Cortez starves its marine life of oxygen, and Mexico's scarce water resources are leaching north, one tomato at a time.*

Mexico's remaining small farmers "are forced to grow their corn on increasingly marginal lands, contributing to deforestation and soil erosion." International and national industrial farmers are buying up better Mexican lands to "produce fruits and vegetables for American tables year-round. It's ridiculous for a country like Mexico, whose people are often hungry, to use its best land to grow produce for a country where food is so abundant that its people are obese – but under free trade it makes economic sense."

*Cheap American corn in Mexico threatens all corn – Zea mays itself – and by extension all of us who have come to depend on this plant. The small Mexican farmers who grow corn in southern Mexico are responsible for maintaining the genetic diversity of the species. While American farmers raise a small handful of genetically nearly identical hybrids, Mexico's small farmers still grow hundreds of different, open-pollinated varieties, commonly called landraces.*

This is just one example of many that have been cited concerning the effects of globalization under the dictates of free trade ideology all around the world. "Perhaps from a strictly economic point of view, free trade in a commodity like corn appears eminently rational. But look at the same phenomenon from a biological point of view and it begins to look woefully short-sighted, if not mad." The human cost of U.S. agricultural policies is devastating. "While one part of the U.S. government speaks of the need to alleviate Third World poverty, another is writing subsidy checks to American farmers, which encourages them to undersell Third World farmers."

**1. Consider other examples of free trade that are unfair.**

**2. Consider how fair trade projects are counteracting unfair free trade.**

## FREE TRADE IS UNFAIR TRADE – THE PHILIPPINES

A *New York Times* editorial for July 20, 2003, entitled “The Rigged Trade Game,” explains how free trade actually works for Filipino farmers.

*Put simply, the Philippines got taken. A charter member of the World Trade Organization in 1995, the former American colony dutifully embraced globalization’s free-market gospel over the last decade, opening its economy to foreign trade and investment. Despite widespread worries about their ability to compete, Filipinos bought the theory that their farmers’ lack of good transportation and high technology would be balanced out by their cheap labor. The government predicted that access to world markets would create a net gain of a half-million farming jobs a year and improve the country’s trade balance.*

It turns out that U.S., Japanese, and European agricultural products are protected by high tariffs and underwritten by massive farm subsidies – despite WTO rules. They invest almost a billion dollars a day in taxpayer subsidies. Filipino farmers simply cannot compete – even working in the fields at a dollar a day – in the global market and even in their local markets. In eight years under the WTO the Philippines has seen American corn growers receive \$34.5 billion in taxpayer support, enabling them to export that corn at two-thirds the cost of production.

The global economy does not offer an even playing field. Quite the contrary. Corporate agro-industry is wiping out the livelihood of millions of small Third World farmers through massive subsidies, tariff barriers, and dumping, “essentially kicking aside the development ladder for some of the world’s most desperate people.” The latter are forced to open their poor economies to imported industrial goods and services, but they are not allowed to export their agricultural goods.

*The developed world’s \$320 billion in farm subsidies [in 2002] dwarfed its \$50 billion in development assistance. President Bush’s pledge to increase foreign aid was followed by his signing of a farm bill providing \$180 billion in support to American farmers over the next decade. A fair shot, more than charity, is what poor nations need. According to International Monetary Fund estimates, a repeal of all rich-country trade barriers and subsidies to agriculture would improve global welfare by about \$120 billion. An uptick of only 1 percent in Africa’s share of world exports would amount to \$70 billion a year, some five times the amount provided to the region in aid and debt relief.*

The future impact of these unfair trade practices on international relations, global poverty, and even terrorism is difficult to estimate. But the hypocrisy and injustice can only lead to resentment and unrest. The Philippines has not gained but lost hundreds of thousands of farming jobs. Globalization is perceived as a new imperialism. “Despair in the countryside feeds a number of potent anti-government insurgencies.”

**Consider the implications of this analysis for U.S. citizens and people of faith.**

## DEBT IN AFRICA – 2004

The Jubilee USA Network ([www.jubileeusa.org](http://www.jubileeusa.org)) has prepared an update on the status of debt in Africa for 2004. This movement has for years been calling for debt cancellation for impoverished nations, most of which are African, in order to allow these countries to use those resources for health and education and the AIDS pandemic.

*In a world where AIDS is claiming more than 8000 lives a day, and literacy rates are falling, the most impoverished nations are siphoning desperately needed resources for health care and education to pay the wealthiest nations and institutions service on a debt that they have already paid three times over. African nations are at the epicenter of both the debt and the AIDS crises, facing drought and famine and recovering from regional conflict. Despite this reality, African nations are paying more in debt service to the U.S. and other creditors than they receive in aid, new loans, or investment.*

Where debt relief has been substantial, health and education spending has increased 40 - 90%. But even among the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (RIPC), relief has been only partial, and it has been conditioned by unhelpful structural adjustments imposed by the donor agencies.

- Today Africa's external debt stands at \$333 billion. African nations pay \$1.51 in debt service for every \$1 received in aid
- African nations have paid their debt three times over in the past ten years alone, yet African nations are three times as indebted as they were ten years ago.
- The average spending on debt service is \$14 per person, while the average spending on health is less than \$5 per person.
- If African governments invested in human development rather than debt payments, an estimated three million more children would live beyond their fifth birthday, and a million cases of malnutrition would be avoided.

The G7 countries originally promised to contribute/cancel \$100 billion of the debts of the 42 Highly Indebted Poor Countries, but contributions have so far fallen far short. Only 34 countries in Africa will have some of their debts reduced. No African nation has been offered full debt cancellation. Many have yet to see any debt relief Contributions have been falling by almost \$1 billion a year since 2000, reducing payments by about 1/3.

The Jubilee USA Network calls on the U.S. to implement the debt relief provision signed into law in 2003 (doubling the amount of debt relief awarded to date) and further to agree in 2004 to 100% cancellation of the external debt of deeply indebted and impoverished African nations without harmful structural adjustment programs.

**1. How can we encourage our government to reduce and eliminate the debts of the world's poorest countries?**

**2. What can our churches do?**

## BIBLICAL FAITH

### BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION

Gerald West's book under this title (Second Revised Edition, Orbis, 1995) proposes *Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, as his subtitle indicates. But he sets this proposal in the wider context of the various liberation theologies (see pp. 83-88). He refers to Per Frostin in describing the methodological shift of this new paradigm with the following emphases: "the choice of the interlocutors of theology; the perception of God; the social analysis of conflicts; the choice of theological tools; and the relationship between theology and praxis." Biblical hermeneutics of liberation is not a self-contained academic exercise. As Gustavo Gutierrez writes in his *Theology of Liberation*, "It is a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation to build a different society, freer and more human." As the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians declared in 1976, "We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World."

The interlocutors for liberation theologies and biblical hermeneutics of liberation are not, as in dominant Western theologies, the educated nonbelievers or Schleiermacher's cultured critics of religion, but the poor, the "non-persons," the exploited, especially those who are excluded in terms of class, gender, and race or culture. The basic problem is not unbelief but idolatry, pursuit of and submission to systems of oppression. The challenge is not to build weighty theological constructs or intellectual apologies but to struggle for the liberation and fullness of life of all God's people. This is "the option for the poor," the basic commitment so often recited at the heart of the new reading of the Gospel, which we all know is "good news to the poor" and "to let the oppressed go free."

This leads us to pose the possibility of re-reading the Bible as a whole through the lenses of the Sabbath-Jubilee vision and mandates that emerge so dramatically in the Torah, are proclaimed so forcefully by the prophets, appear so centrally in the mission and message of Jesus, and are equally central to the life of the early church. The Bible is not to be relegated to "religious" and "spiritual" matters but is fundamentally concerned about social relations, economics, and human wholeness in community—locally, globally, and ecologically.

- 1. Reflect on your own faith formation as a child, as a young person, and/or as an adult and ask yourself what have been the central concerns of that faith formation.**
- 2. Consider what radical shifts you may have experienced in your faith journey, in your understanding of God and God's purpose for humankind and creation.**
- 3. If in fact the poor and excluded and oppressed are to be recognized as primary interlocutors for our theology and our mission, what might be the implications for our lives?**

## JESUS AND EMPIRE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL – I

Warren Carter, in his commentary *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Trinity Press, 2001), analyzes Matthew's Gospel in the context of the Roman Empire of the late First Century CE. His findings are remarkably relevant for our time. In Part One he describes the ROMAN IMPERIAL SYSTEM; in Part Two JESUS, AGENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES; and in Part Three COUNTERNARRATIVES.

*Matthew's Gospel contests and resists the Roman Empire's claims to sovereignty over the world. It sustains an alternative community of disciples of Jesus in anticipation of the coming triumph of God's Empire over all things, including the destruction of Rome's empire. That is to say, the Gospel resists Rome with a social challenge in offering a vastly different vision and experience of human community, and with a theological challenge in asserting that the world belongs to God, not Rome, and that God's purposes run through Israel and Jesus, not Rome. (p. 1)*

We know that a small ruling elite controlled the vast Roman Empire through political, economic, and military power, dominating and exploiting 90% of the population, largely rural peasants and urban artisans. What has not been recognized sufficiently is the use of Roman imperial theology to rationalize and disguise "the fundamental inequities in the Roman system that exists for the economic benefit of the elite." (p.32) Rome's peace, which was celebrated by the ruling elite through poetry, inscriptions, coins, and buildings, was "sanctioned with religious claims." It signified "being pacified politically, militarily, and economically by Rome as the will of the gods." (p.32) Matthew's Gospel, which Carter places in the Roman city of Antioch in the 80s, confronts Roman imperial power, especially Roman imperial theology, explicitly and indirectly.

*Matthew's Gospel assumes this experience of Roman imperial power on every page. Sometimes it refers explicitly to the imperial world, such as in the scenes involving Rome's allies (the Herods in chapters 2 and 14), or about paying taxes to Caesar (22: 15-22), or in the crucifixion of Jesus (26 and 27). But often the imperial realities are not explicit. The Gospel expects that the audience will recognize these realities and understand the Gospel in relation to them. (p.35)*

When Jesus confronted the "religious" leaders, his conflict was not just religious, for the religious leaders were themselves part of the ruling elite who defended the social order that benefitted them. His conflict with them was not simply religious but also social, political, and economic. Matthew's Gospel challenges Rome's empire fundamentally.

*Instead of acknowledging the emperor's sovereignty, it proclaims God as Lord of heaven and earth. Instead of claiming the emperor as the commissioned agent of the gods, it presents Jesus as God's anointed or agent. Instead of claiming the emperor manifest divine presence on earth, it proclaims Jesus as the one whom God has anointed to reveal God's saving purpose and will, Instead of accepting that human and societal well-being are found in submission to Rome's emperor and a hierarchically structured, exploitative society, it claims well-being from God's merciful activity. It calls disciples of Jesus to live these claims as an alternative community. The story of Jesus presents both a social and theological challenge to Rome's empire. (p.73)*

**Consider how Matthew's Gospel might be written for our time. What would Jesus denounce, and what would he affirm in terms of today's powerful and poor?**

## JESUS AND EMPIRE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL – II

Warren Carter's book, *Matthew and Empire* (Trinity Press, 2001) calls for a "re-reading" of Matthew's Gospel in the context of and as resistance to the Roman Empire of the late First Century. This re-reading make take a stance that is resistive, transformative, or constructive as the imperial power is demonically unjust, misguided, or well intentioned. "It must incorporate both theological engagement and social embodiment" – today in our own contexts as it was intended in its original context. (p. 175)

1. Following the angel's announcement to Joseph that Mary's child will "save his people from their sins," Matthew cites the prophet Isaiah in 1:23, giving that child the name Emmanuel, "God with us." We must remember that the Isaiah passage as well as the Matthew text addresses "a situation of imperial threat." (p. 97) So we would misread or misinterpret the passage if we were to limit it to personal sin and salvation.
2. Matthew cites Isaiah again in 4: 14-16 at the announcement of Jesus' ministry and message, just after the temptation story, in which Jesus is tempted to worship the devil in order to gain "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor," a clear reference to the Roman Empire. The reference to Isaiah 9 refers to the threat of destruction of Samaria by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BCE, and the hope of "a great light" may refer to the inauguration of King Hezekiah in 715 BCE. The coming of the Kingdom of Heaven through Jesus brings far more than "personal salvation."
3. Jesus' invitation to "all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens" in 11:28-30 takes on new meaning in light of First Century CE Roman oppression, as does Jesus' promise of rest. "To know 'rest' is to experience God's salvation from this imperial world with the establishment of God's reign over all, including Rome." (P. 121)
4. Paying taxes to Rome may, according to Matthew 17:24-27, be a subversive act. With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, "the Temple tax" would refer to the Temple of Jupiter levied by Emperor Vespasian on all Jews. Jesus complies with the demands of empire, but he exposes the tax's exploitative nature. And by means of the fish he reminds his hearers that Rome's power is not final, that God is sovereign.
5. In Matthew 27: 11-26 Jesus is condemned by Pilate, the Roman governor. Conflict with empire runs through the entire gospel, beginning with King Herod and the wise men in 2:1-18, and it culminates in the alliance of Rome with local elites, including the religious leaders of the Jews. Once again it must be emphasized that the religious, socio-political, and economic interests are intertwined. The contrast between Jesus and Pilate, God's empire and the Roman Empire is absolute.

**Spell out the meaning of sin and salvation in the context of empire, ancient and modern, as taught by Matthew's Gospel.**

**Consider the relation between church and state, God's empire and the U.S. empire, Christian discipleship and civic responsibility, in our time.**

## JESUS AT NAZARETH - LUKE 4: 16-20

- A. Jesus came to Nazareth. . . went to the synagogue
- B. He stood up to read
  - C. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him
  - D. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written
  - E. The Spirit of the Lord. . .has anointed me
    - F. To bring good news to the poor
    - G. To proclaim release to the captives
    - H. And recovery of sight to the blind
    - G' To let the oppressed go free
    - F' To proclaim
    - E' The year of the Lord's favor
  - D' He rolled up the scroll
  - C' Gave it back to the attendant
  - B' And sat down
- A' The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

This is the most important passage in Luke's Gospel. It has been placed here as Jesus' first act and his first declaration at the beginning of his ministry, in the Nazareth synagogue, on the Sabbath Day. Luke chooses this incident to indicate clearly that Jesus came to proclaim "the year of the Lord's favor," the Jubilee. He places it here in the place where Matthew and Mark identify the message of Jesus with the words, "the Reign of God has come near." For Luke, Jesus proclaims the Reign of God as Jubilee.

1. According to this chiasmic analysis, at the center of Jesus' mission is recovery of sight to the blind. What does this focus mean? What evidence do we find throughout Luke's Gospel that Jesus came to bring sight to the blind? What does this mean for our ministries today?
2. We also find a strong emphasis on liberation or freedom: to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free. What meaning does this have throughout Luke's Gospel? What importance does it have or should it have in our ministries?
3. We find, thirdly, an emphasis on the preaching of good news for the poor and the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. How is the Jubilee related to the poor? In what ways did Jesus proclaim good news to the poor, the year of the Lord's favor? How do we preach good news for the poor today?

## ELIJAH AND ELISHA

According to Luke's narrative of Jesus' inaugural sermon at the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-30), all who were there "were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth," but later all of them "were filled with rage." Between those two contrasting observations, Jesus explains his startling reference to "the year of the Lord's favor" which has been "fulfilled in your hearing" by referring to two Old Testament incidents involving the two greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha. The first is about Elijah and provision for the widow of Zarephath and her son. The second is about Elisha and the healing of a Syrian general. Interpreters have focused on the alien identity of these two persons as the cause of the dramatic shift in attitude of the people of Nazareth toward Jesus. After all, Jesus was announcing the Jubilee, the Reign of God, and they naturally understood that Israel would be the sole or primary beneficiary of this Good News.

Certainly, Jesus here demonstrates that God's grace is for all peoples, not just Israel. It is important for Luke to make this declaration at this critical time and place as a key to his two volume message, Luke-Acts, which begins at Nazareth, moves to Jerusalem, and ends with the preaching of Paul in Rome. At the end of his record, Luke notes that some of the Jews "were convinced" and others "refused to believe," and Paul declares "This salvation has been sent to the Gentiles." (Acts 28:24,29)

Further examination of the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha reveals, however, that more is at stake. The Zarephath widow and her son were facing starvation among the most vulnerable of all people at a time of extreme drought under the exploitative, idolatrous reign of Ahab and Jezebel. She shared from her very last handful of meal and her remaining drops of oil to serve Elijah and was given an abundant supply of both. This story confirms Jesus' message of "good news to the poor" in concrete Sabbath-Jubilee terms, as in the daily provision of manna and quails. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

At the witness of an Israelite slave girl, Naaman, the Syrian general was sent by his king to the king of Israel for healing from leprosy. Elisha came to the rescue and gave instructions through a messenger, requiring Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan River, which he finally did at the recommendation of his own servants. After accepting these successive humiliations, he was completely healed, but even then the prophet refused to accept any reward. This story, too, amplifies our understanding of Jubilee-Reign of God, which brings healing to all who will humble themselves from their own power and pride and learn from the weak and lowly. (2 Kings 5:1-19)

No further references to Elisha are to be found in Luke (or the rest of the New Testament), but Elijah is given a prominent role. He is named as the prototype of John the Baptist in Luke 1:17; he is referred to in terms of Jesus' identity in 9:8 and 19; he appears with Moses at the transfiguration in 9:30,33. In any case further study of Elijah and Elisha is merited because Jesus identifies himself with them in his Nazareth sermon, even as he refers to himself as a prophet in 4:24.

**What lessons from Elijah and Elisha can we apply to our ministries today?**

## RESPONSIBLE DISCIPLESHIP

### CAMPAIGNING AGAINST SWEATSHOPS

The Summer 2004 issue of *Co-op America Quarterly* offers “A Guide to Ending Sweatshops.” Corporate greed and global competition have intensified the pressure on producers, especially in poor countries, to lower costs by lowering wages and benefits, minimizing factory standards, and demanding greater productivity, in some cases through forced overtime, punishments and fines, intimidation, child labor, and other abuses. On the other hand people of concern are increasing their pressure on the entire supply chain from producers to consumers for greater justice for workers and their families.

*Together, step-by-step, you and I are turning sweatshops around the world into workplaces that offer people living wages, decent conditions, and opportunities to create better futures for themselves and their families.*

*Thanks to the pressure consumers, investors, workers, and allied organizations are putting on major corporations, companies like Liz Claiborne, Bebe, the Gap, and Talbots are taking steps to monitor and improve conditions in the factories they contract with here in the US and around the world.*

*Workers around the world who face sweatshop conditions every day on the job are organizing. . . to demand safe working conditions, fair wages, and the right to self-determination. At the same time, US groups are still uncovering sweatshops from New York to L.A., and unions are fighting to preserve gains from overtime pay to health benefits.*

Campaigns against sweatshops are organizing “NOT to close sweatshops and put already impoverished people out on the streets” but to turn them into responsible, healthful, and responsible workplaces. This means that companies must pay workers a living wage, “enough to meet their basic human needs and enable them to plan for a better future,” allow education to enable workers and their families to learn about their rights and advocate for better conditions, and permit worker self-determination, “to freely associate and advocate for rights and improvements to their working conditions, pay, and benefits without fear of reprisal.” Local, national, and international campaigns organize consumer demonstrations and boycotts against abusive companies and stores, shareholder actions by investors, investigation and monitoring of production facilities with codes of conduct to be upheld by wholesalers and retailers and subcontractors, union organizing to uphold worker rights, education of the public regarding responsible shopping and investing, etc.

Among the many organizations now engaged in this work are: SWEATSHOP WATCH ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)), CAMPAIGN TO ABOLISH SWEATSHOPS & CHILD LABOR ([www.abolishsweatshops.org](http://www.abolishsweatshops.org)), NATIONAL INTERFAITH COMMITTEE FOR WORKPLACE JUSTICE ([www.nicwj.org](http://www.nicwj.org)). These in turn have links to many others.

**What are your concerns for the millions of factory workers around the world who are making the clothes we wear and many other things we need? Is this a spiritual matter? What can churches do?**

## OPPOSING MODERN SLAVERY – THE TACO BELL BOYCOTT

The Presbyterian Church (USA), like other denominations and church groups, has engaged in various consumer boycotts: in opposition to products made by child labor (1937), public accommodations that discriminate because of race (1960), table grapes in support of the United Farm Workers (1973), Nestle Corporation for promoting infant formula in developing countries (1978), and J.P. Steven's Corp. for precluding workers' right to organize (1979). In 2002 it launched a boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and products with the affirmation: "Our consumer decisions should be shaped by our beliefs, should translate or be a 'sign' of those beliefs in the world of commerce." An earlier statement of the church affirms "mutual responsibility between employers and employees, producers and consumers."

*None of us works independently. Employees, employers, and consumers need each other, depend upon each other, and owe each other help beyond the letter of the law . . . Our partners in work, even when we cannot see them or know them personally, deserve our respect and our attention to their needs.*

A regional body of the Presbyterian Church in southwest Florida had discovered that tomato pickers were being subjected to inhumane working and living conditions. They had to pick and haul two tons of tomatoes to earn 50 dollars; they earn about \$6500 a year, which has not increased in 20 years; there have been five cases of modern-day debt-bondage slavery among these workers in recent years. In 1996 these workers formed the Coalition Immokalee Workers (CIW), a community-based worker organization that represents Mexican, Guatemalan, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low wage jobs throughout the state. Their appeals to the growers to raise wages or to dialogue with the workers went unheeded, so they engaged in hunger strikes, work stoppages, and appeals to government leaders. In 2000 the CIW appealed to Taco Bell, a major client of the Florida growers but got no response.

Local churches have been ministering to the needs of the farm workers through donations of clothing and food, prayer, and support for other service organizations, and they obtained grants for worker campaigns and a consumer co-op. They sought more basic change by approaching the problem from the top of the agri-food industry chain by putting pressure on Taco Bell, which has 6500 restaurants in the US, and on its parent corporation, Yum! Brands, Inc., which also owns Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Long John Silvers, and A&W. The tomato pickers are requesting a one cent per pound increase, which would almost double their income, and this would not disrupt the market for the growers or for Taco Bell.

The Coalition Immokalee Workers are asking Taco Bell to participate in three-way talks between the company, tomato suppliers, and CIW representatives, to contribute to an immediate increase in farm worker wages, and to establish a code of conduct that would ensure workers' fundamental rights. The boycott is to reinforce these demands.

**List ways in which local churches can support the Taco Bell boycott.**

## FAIR TRADE COFFEE

In recent months alarming reports have been circulating about the global glut in the coffee market and its effect on more than 25 million coffee farmers, their families, and their communities. *Coop America Quarterly* (Spring 2003) reports that 600,000 coffee farmers and workers have lost their jobs in Central America; 700,000 families in Ethiopia face economic instability complicated by the HIV / AIDS crisis; in many places prices have fallen so low that the farmers cannot feed and care for their children adequately; in some cases sales do not even cover the cost of production. At the same time major companies and investors are enjoying windfall profits. "Under conventional trade, the race for profit drives companies to minimize their costs by exploiting workers and the environment in developing countries." (14)

"Fair trade is based on the principle of putting workers and the environment first, while still working in a healthy business model. Businesses committed to fair trade agree to adhere to the following criteria in their relationships with farmers and workers:

*Cooperative and healthy workplaces*  
*A fair and living wage*  
*Environmental sustainability*  
*Consumer education and public disclosure*  
*Respect for cultural identity.* (14)

"Fair trade guarantees farmers a fair wage for their labor, lifts them out of poverty, and puts farmers on the road to self-determination. Fair trade is bringing hope and justice to coffee farmers throughout the world." (16) We the consumers can play a major role in this growing movement, which reaches out not only to coffee farmers but also to other workers in similar circumstances. Co-op America lists five fast ways to act:

*Buy fair trade products.*  
*Encourage fair trade business practices.*  
*Educate others.*  
*Invest in fair trade businesses.*  
*Join campaigns.*

Many of us have been deeply concerned about the enormous inequalities in our world and our seeming powerlessness compared with the corporations that dominate trade. The fair trade movement brings the realities of global economics right down to where we live, what we buy, eat, and wear, how we practice our faith. Some faith communities begin simply by serving and selling fair trade coffee after worship and at other meetings, making available information about the movement and inviting friends to consider this option for themselves. They in turn can pass the word along to others, and some may take steps that will affect businesses, investments, and the environment as well as workers. By 2001 there were 7000 retail outlets selling fair trade goods in the US and Canada, an increase of 271% in just one year. The Fair Trade Federation estimates that worldwide sales of fair trade goods have reached \$500 million already.

Safeway, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, and Starbucks now carry fair trade coffee-but it must be requested. To find fair trade coffee, chocolate, tea, crafts, jewelry, etc. see Co-op America's *National Green Pages* ([www.greenpages.org](http://www.greenpages.org)) or TransFair USA ([www.transfairusa.org/do/whereToBuy](http://www.transfairusa.org/do/whereToBuy)).

**Consider the ways in which your family and faith community are already participating in the fair trade movement and additional steps you may wish to take with them.**

## JUBILEE HOUSEHOLDS

*Casas de Jubileo (Spanish for Jubilee Households) is a newly forming network of households that are imagining and creating new/old patterns for living sustainably – an alternative to the unsustainable patterns of materialism and consumerism. We seek a different style of home life than what is presented in the "good housekeeping" images of the dominant culture or by the "traditional family" of some religious and political groups. Our name comes from the Sabbath-Jubilee in the Bible, which imagines households living out values that differ from imperial economics of domination over others and the earth. We want our lifestyles to express more of the Spirit's movement, less of the spirit of the times. . . . We want to reclaim time as a gift of God, reclaiming it from all powers who want us to give it to them in labor. Recognizing that swimming upstream against the cultural flow can be both freeing and demanding, we seek community with others who also want to pursue this other way.*

Each household that wishes to participate in this network is asked to develop a statement or declaration of intention that may include some of the ways it is already practicing Jubilee sustainability and spirituality, challenges it faces or further steps it intends to take toward such practice, Sabbath-Jubilee foundations it affirms, and what it offers for common use during the coming year. This declaration can then be shared with other Jubilee households nearby or more widely. Following is one suggested outline for Jubilee household declarations (SCENE).

**Sabbath** - Weekly rest, centering spaces, individual and collective prayer, biblical reflection.

**Community** - Overcoming individualism and privatization, holding and working in common.

**Economics** - Supporting local living economies, withholding from global corporations, overcoming social apartheid between rich and poor, building connections.

**Non-violence** - Resisting personal, institutional, and national patterns of economic, ecological, and military violence.

**Ecology** - Commitment to sustainability so that all can benefit from Earth's bounty.

Specific applications in these and other areas may include food and beverages, transportation, clothing, finances, energy, yard and garden, healthcare and wellness. Variety and creativity are welcomed as each household gives shape to its practice of Jubilee in daily life. The global and the local should be joined, as should the political and the spiritual. Local and wider gatherings of Jubilee households will widen and deepen our commitments, our understanding, our practice of Jubilee spirituality, Sabbath economics. To make connections with this network, contact Grace Gyori ([gyori@igc.org](mailto:gyori@igc.org)) or Lee Van Ham ([jemsandiego@yahoo.com](mailto:jemsandiego@yahoo.com)).

**1. What are your responses to and questions about the vision of Jubilee Households?**

**2. What steps might you and others take to explore this vision further?**

## GOOD WORK – FOR ALL OF US

As we become aware of the unprecedented economic inequality in today's world, locally and globally, and as we discover the centrality of the biblical message of economic justice, abundant life for all God's people, we will need to find ways to practice our own calling, individually and collectively, in terms of this reality and this message. Good Work, a nonprofit organization in Durham, North Carolina, offers a mission statement and a range of goals that might be suggestive for any church or social concern working group, i.e., for all of us.

*Good Work envisions people living in just and caring communities with the power and access to resources to create the lives they want. Good Work helps strengthen the economic lives of working people and build community through training, education, and support.*

*Good work provides business skills training, financial education, and ongoing support for working families and community entrepreneurs. Good work also offers training on economic justice issues and culturally appropriate development for community organizations and community activists.*

*Organizational goals include:*

- *Fostering entrepreneurial development, asset building, and financial education*
- *Promoting economic justice and culturally appropriate community development*
- *Supporting people and communities marginalized by economic inequalities and exploitation*
- *Building community that bridges divisions and enhances opportunities for learning, collaboration, sharing, and leadership across divides*

Good Work offers small business and non-profit entrepreneurial training in understanding personal, family, and business budgeting, personal credit, networking, marketing, financial management, business financing, etc. It also provides training in economic literacy, leadership, human relations, community building, asset-based community development, and economic justice for entrepreneurs, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and community activists.

*We help people examine how economic inequalities are rooted in a history of oppression build on the interconnectedness of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation. We also show how the widening wealth gap is influenced by the domination of local cultures through exploitative commerce, criminal justice arrangements, structural violence, and war. . . . We hope to help people recognize their own power to transform their life and community. (John Parker, Director, 919.682.8473, [johnp@goodwork.org](mailto:johnp@goodwork.org))*

**1. Does this proposal correspond in any way to your local church's understanding of its mission?**

**If not, why not?**

**2. How much of this proposal could reasonably be undertaken by your local church? If not, by whom?**