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Moral Values that Can Change the World:
Reflections on Faith and the Common Good

Inside this issue of Justice Seekers you will find a new congregational discussion resource in our series, Moral Values that Can Change the World: Reflections on Faith and the Common Good. Each one focuses on a key issue of our times. The four we've selected to begin this series are:

- **Building a Moral Economy in a Corporate World**
- **The Dream is Not Yet Real - Building Racial Equality**
- **Paying Taxes is a Moral Act: Faith Values and the Common Good**
- **Care for the Stranger: Immigration and the 21st Century Slave Trade in California**

While these Moral Values that Can Change the World: Reflections on Faith and the Common Good discussion guides are concise and easy to read, they go well beyond the simple information and simpler arguments that so often are all the mainstream news media give us these days. We also want to hear from you concerning the justice issues you want to see study resources developed to address.

From the Executive Director:

Since 1913 the California Council of Churches has labored to be present for you, helping to create a world that cares for all of its citizens regardless of economic class, age, gender, race and ethnicity, religious belief, or sexual orientation.

Keeping the Commandments of love and compassion. Following the Golden Rule. Acting justly, loving tenderly, and walking humbly with our God. Loving our brothers and sisters as we do ourselves. These are our core values.

Today the mainstream and progressive spiritual communities of faith are at a crossroads. We are hungry for a world where our values are made manifest in justice, kindness, and peace. And yet the words of faith that are heard most loudly in our land are too often angry, limiting, and mean. They do not reflect who we really are as people of faith, people who seek a better, more humane world.

Join Our Activist Network!

Help us make a difference by signing up to receive e-mail action alerts when legislation or issues arise where compassionate people of faith can make a difference. Visit www.calchurches.org or www.churchimpact.org and look for "Join Our Mailing List." Our activists have made a measurable difference on many issues from the environment and social services to civil rights and economic justice. Together, we can accomplish what no individual or congregation can do alone.

Call us to schedule advocacy trainings in your area, judicatory gathering, or congregation.



California Council of Churches and its sister organization, California Council of Churches IMPACT, make this link between faith and action. Our commitment to denominations whom we represent places the highest priority on helping our congregational members see the connection between what they do on Sundays and what they must do the remaining six days. We enact your vision beyond what any single congregation or group can accomplish alone.

Please help support us! We have accomplished a tremendous amount of good with very limited resources. We are well on our way to recovery, but to reach our goal, we need your support. Please send a generous check to support our common vision or contribute securely online at www.calchurches.org or www.churchimpact.org.

Thank you!

Building a Moral Economy in a Global World

Introduction and Context

Our contemporary global economy rests on two amoral principles: unfettered mobility of capital and unrestricted uses of the least-costly labor. Free markets, it has been argued, will create untold wealth for everyone. There are indeed riches for some, but entire industries have been shuttered, shipped overseas, torn down, and their former employees now find only poorly-paying jobs in the service sector, have lost pensions, benefits, and even homes, are in debt or bankruptcy. We have seen the disparities in wealth soar to heights unimagined since the Robber Barons. Recipients of riches too often direct their money not back into productive investment but into high-cost, low-wage luxury goods and services that create fewer and less well-paying jobs. No one and no community is secure. The many are sacrificed for the few.

A truly moral economy presumes human well-being is as important as making money. The post-World War II ‘social contract’ was a key step, but that ‘contract’ has been shattered. A social safety net still exists, but a moral economy doesn’t just maintain people in their need, it frees them from want. It rewards work and commands responsibility from all, especially those receiving greater abundance. It helps build personal wealth: homes, education, training and also builds our common wealth: employee involvement in the operation and rewards of their work, and community direction over its own economic growth. It cherishes all natural resources as God’s gifts to be used wisely then replenished and restored. It presumes we are but one people, and this world is for the benefit of all.

Creating a Moral Economy is possible; it existed in our own historical past. The thirteen original colonies embraced these principles in their daily lives. Price and quality for all goods and services were regulated by towns. People could not be stripped of their livelihood; the wealthiest merchant was obligated to uphold honest transactions when dealing with the poorest laborer. Property, as a requirement to vote, could consist of the tools of one’s trade. In northern colonies, unencumbered by the horrors of slavery,

the franchise included free people of color and women who headed their households. Every child was taught and practiced some skill by which to earn a living. The poor were entitled to the support of their town when they could not provide for themselves. For nearly 200 years colonies lived by these moral considerations and flourished as a people.

Theological Foundations

Sabbath Economics, the underpinnings for a moral economy, emerges from Deuteronomy, Leviticus and the New Testament. The laws of equity in transaction, the forgiveness of debt, and fairness to workers sought to establish balance between those with and without resources. Depriving a person of his or her livelihood was a great evil. Poverty was not a sin; creating poverty in others was. Removing the tools of self-sufficiency or appropriating essential resources were forbidden. (*Dt. 24:6, 10-13.*)

Servants were bound for a maximum of seven years at which time they were to be freed with resources for their own keep. This was the foundation of apprenticeship through which children were to be trained to become independent. (*Dt. 15, 12-18*). Both Old and New Testaments support the employers’ obligations to workers. “Everyone is to receive the fruit of their labors.” (*Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:14; 25:4; Lk. 10:7; 1T. 5:18.*) Outside of slavery (a massive, un-Biblical evil), creation of a permanent underclass was unthinkable until the 19th Century, when new philosophies of rampant individualism, *laissez-faire*, and Social Darwinism justified the few amassing great wealth freely at the expense of workers and society. However, the Social Gospel



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The mission of the California Council of Churches and California Church IMPACT is to be a prophetic witness to the Gospel by educating faith communities, and advocating in the public policy arena, to pursue justice, equity, and fairness, in the treatment of all people, in particular those most vulnerable in our society.

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remained sufficiently powerful to be part of the foundation for essential reforms. Once again these are under attack by amoral principles of the so-called free market and a new Social Darwinism. But we can again marshal the tenets of faith to create a more humane and moral world.

Conclusion

The California Council of Churches is working to rebuild a moral economy in 21st-century America. We begin by restoring the fundamental moral principles: people must be able to support themselves and their families; communities must be able to sustain their own economies and social stability. Through California Council of Churches IMPACT, our advocacy sister organization, we advocate for living wages, worker rights, universal health care, and other supports for working families. But we are challenged to go beyond these issues. We must alter state and federal laws giving incentives to businesses to abandon their workers and our communities, to close plants for the huge tax refunds they obtain in so doing, and to exploit the cheapest labor among the 'least of these' here and abroad. Churches are powerful agents of creating a moral economy. They have spearheaded redevelopment projects around the nation. CCC and CCCI are working with legislators to find grant and loan programs that can extend revitalization for urban and rural communities. We are working to create legislation that will challenge companies with unfulfilled obligations, promised for tax relief and incentives, from abandoning our state and cities without compensation. We are strengthening laws and supports for worker-owned businesses and for community-controlled redevelopment projects. We are supporting the expansion of 'micro-credit' programs that help low-income people start small but thriving businesses here – businesses that not only give people direct control over their economic lives but that have created more jobs in our state than comparable employment by major corporations. We are, in sum, bringing some of what our more holistic missionary programs do abroad back to California and, we hope, the nation. The principles upon which we rest include self-help, both individual and communal; self-direction so that economic choices are made partly by those affected; shared resources that both promote good stewardship and reduce the need for war; shared benefits so that the 'rising tide' actually lifts from below with benefit to all. These principles are grounded in our beliefs, and are just as practical here as they are in Third World countries. We have confidence in our churches, members, and faith tenets. Together we can change the world so that our political economy serves the common good and helps people face the future, assured they *have* a future.

Resources

Gar Alperovitz. *America Beyond Capitalism.* 2005. Alperovitz links economic autonomy for workers with the possibilities for reviving true democratic participation. He gives examples of successful employee ownership and management in America.

Wendell Barry. *What are People For?* 1990. Barry writes about the importance of spiritual stewardship, community, and sustainable economies.

William Greider. *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy.* 2003. This critique of global capital is coupled with suggestions for alternative ways of doing business and establishing new values.

David Griffin, Catherine Keller, Richard Falk, John Cobb. *American Empire and the Commonwealth of God.* 2006. Powerful essays on changing our contemporary morality and soul-less expansionism.

Yes! Winter, 2007 issue on "Go Local: Declare Independence from the Corporate Global Economy."

E.F. Schumaker. *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered.* 1973. This vintage tome is still relevant and a very good read.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the basic biblical principles on which we should base our economic policies and practices?
2. What do scripture, tradition, experience, and reason tell us are the highest priorities for people of faith? Maximizing profit? Care of Creation? Human respect, worth, and value?
3. Can we reconcile contemporary global capitalist disregard for human consequence with our faith principles? What can we keep? What must we change?
4. What alternatives to 'corporatism' (both private companies and state control) will enhance democracy and economic participation?
5. What do we have to 'give up' to obtain a moral economy? Is it worth the sacrifice? Why or why not?
6. What benefits to obtaining more direct participation in economic decisions might come to us as individuals, families, communities, a nation?
7. What are the greatest economic needs in your community? Where can your congregation get involved to help create a moral economy?

Visit the California Council of Churches online at www.calchurches.org

California Interfaith Coalition's 2007

Legislative Issues Briefing

On Behalf of Justice and Righteousness

Dinner: Monday, March 26, 6 to 8 P.M.

Speakers: Assm. Loni Hancock and Jim DeHarrpote, Catholic Relief Services

Legislative Issues Briefing: Tuesday, March 27, 8:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M.

Keynote Speaker: TBA; Lunch Speaker: Martin Gallegos

Workshops: What's New in Health Care; Our Failed Prison System; Uplifting the Poor; Caring for Creation; The Stranger Among Us; Revitalizing Our Economy.

Join legislative visits — speak your mind!

Contact us for more information or to receive registration materials!

CCC/CCCI, 4044 Pasadena Avenue, Sacramento CA 95821, 916-488-7300 ext. 3

or ccinfo@calchurches.org

Complete details and registration info are available online at www.calchurches.org!

To:

**Building a Moral Economy in a
Corporate World**

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