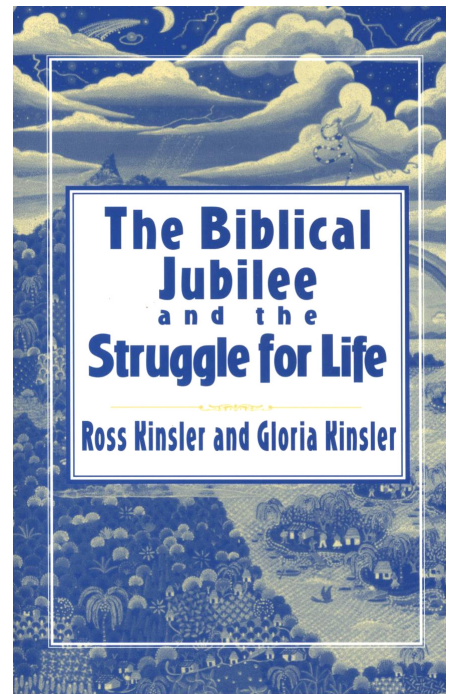


**Foreword to Ross and Gloria Kinsler
*The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for
Life (Orbis, 1999)***

By Ched Myers

A commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the jubilee. Thus, in the spirit of the book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world.” --John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adventiente* 1994



“WE READ THE GOSPEL as if we had no money,” laments American Jesuit theologian John Haughey, “and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel.” Indeed, the topic of economics is exceedingly difficult to talk about in most First World churches, more taboo than politics or even sex. Yet no aspect of our individual and corporate lives is more determinative of our welfare. And few subjects are more frequently addressed in our scriptures.

The standard of economic and social justice is woven into the warp and weft of the Bible. Pull this strand and the whole fabric unravels. At the heart of this witness is the call to Sabbath and Jubilee, a tradition we might summarize in three axioms:

1. The world as created by God is abundant, with enough for everyone—provided that human communities restrain their appetites and live within limits;
2. Disparities in wealth are not “natural” but the result of human sin, and must be mitigated within the community of faith through the regular practice of wealth redistribution;
3. The prophetic message calls people to the practice of such redistribution, and is thus characterized as “good news” to the poor.

The Bible contends that this Sabbath theology of abundant grace and this Jubilee ethic of wealth and power redistribution is the only way out of our historical and persistent slavery to Debt systems, with their competing theologies of meritocracy and alienating practices of wealth and power concentration.

“Sabbath economics” is an unfamiliar notion to North American churches because it has been marginalized by biblical interpreters, whose silence has helped to legitimate the very stratification of wealth that the Bible denounces.

Skeptical of the Jubilee tradition as either irrelevant, utopian dreaming or threatening, radical propaganda, they have not found evidence for its practice in either Testament because they have not been looking for it.. This is because, as theologian Wayne Meeks asserts in his excellent book *God the Economist*, “Our theological imaginations have long been captive to the market-driven orthodoxies of modern capitalism.” Fortunately, Ross and Gloria Kinsler’s thorough and accessible summary and rehabilitation of the Jubilee tradition for our time begins to redress this longstanding and scandalous suppression of “good news” for the poor.

The Kinslers are uniquely qualified for this task because they have come to their convictions through the fire of experience. Long-term Presbyterian missionaries in Central America, Ross and Gloria have lived through some of the worst of times in a region wracked over the past three decades by intensifying poverty and violence. The Kinslers have also witnessed first-hand—and been contributors to—the survival and resurgence of popular movements of faith and liberation, despite the repressive conditions. Over the years they have faithfully labored to interpret Central American realities to the North American church, and have facilitated many a visit to the region. Gloria is legendary as an exposure tour leader and organizer, while Ross has itinerated throughout Latin America spreading the vision and practice of popular theological education.

These reflections, then, arise not from abstract musing, but from the heart of a social movement of faith, hope and love. The Kinslers stand in a legacy of solidarity work that has offered Sanctuary to refugees, born Witness against the violence of military regimes, and through it all, kept reading the scriptures. This movement is part of the “subversive memory” of Jubilee justice that has kept erupting throughout church history. It animated early monks, medieval communitarians and radical Reformers. It was given voice in the tracts of 18th century “Levelers” and in 19th century African slave spirituals. And today, at the turning of the millennia, this vision of “release from the bondage of debt” is again firing the imaginations of faith-based activists. We can see this in groups such as the international “Jubilee 2000” Campaign, that is educating and organizing in support of debt-relief for impoverished Third World countries. And we can see it in the many local experiments with small-scale and alternative business practices, technologies, land uses, financial systems, trade patterns, consumption habits, and income distribution schemes.

To be sure, these are hard times for those trying to find alternatives to a triumphant march of a global capitalism that leaves in its wake ever-increasing disparities between rich and poor. *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* rightly understand this historical moment as a unique opportunity for the church to renew its spirituality and its mission to the world by rediscovering the radically different vision of economic and social practice found at the heart of her own story.

This book is the ideal resource for churches to nurture commitment and

creativity by promoting “Jubilee literacy,” a spirituality of forgiveness and reparation, and practical economic disciplines for individuals, households and congregations. But the Kinslers are clear that with this hope for renewal also comes a warning: any theology that refuses to reckon with the realities of the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and power in the human family today is both cruel and irrelevant. We Christians *must* talk about economics, and talk about it in light of the gospel.

"Who, then, can be saved?" (Mk 10:26). The evangelist Mark's epilogue to the infamous story of Jesus and the rich man, so troublesome for our North American churches, anticipates our incredulous resistance. Does Jesus *really* expect the “haves” (that is, us) to participate in wealth redistribution as a condition for discipleship (10:22)? Can we imagine a world in which there are no rich and poor? To the disciples' skepticism, and to ours, Jesus replies simply: "I know it seems impossible to you, but for God all things are possible" (10:27). In other words, economics is ultimately a theological issue.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Kinslers for their faithful labor, which has born fruit for all of us in this volume. May this ancient biblical vision indeed animate new possibilities for our history, as invoked in the prayer of the nineteenth century abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison:

God speed the year of jubilee, the wide world o'er!
When from their galling chains set free,
Th' oppressed shall vilely bend the knee
And wear the yoke of tyranny, like brutes, no more—
That year will come, and Freedom's reign
To all their plundered rights again, restore.