



PEACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE
Preferential Option for the Poor
(Week 6 of an 8-Week Series)

We continue our series on building solidarity with the poor as we publish excerpts from Jack Jezreel's 1997 article, "Why the Preferential Option for the Poor is Not Optional:"

STEP 5: Watch your money.

You may be familiar with the story of Harry Wu, the Chinese Catholic who returned to his native country under the threat of death to document the forced child-labor camps producing, of all things, stuffed toys. Well, besides reading up on labor-rights abuses, trying to educate congregations, and possibly writing letters to the Chinese government, it strikes me that we're not going to want to buy products made by slaves—even if they're cheaper.

Do I think not buying a teddy bear made in China will change the world? Yes. I do not want to be part of a market demand that reduces children to such a state. I can support companies that care for their employees and can petition my government to pressure the Chinese government into a more responsible posture toward such abuse. In the meantime, my children watch and learn something valuable. Yes, it does change the world.

A mature, well-considered dedication to the poor also will probably result in a simpler life, with less things and less preoccupation with money and possessions. It's tougher to care too much about another pair of shoes when you've met people who have none. And there is something freeing about having less stuff. Saint Francis called the simple life "a lady," which I guess meant he liked it.

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