

**Britain – The Times – October 16 2006**



The Duchess of Bedford peruses the goods on a Mothers' Union stall at a church bazaar in Luton in 1959. The organisation is now focusing on helping the environment and the world

## **Thou shalt help to save the planet, Mothers' Union tells its 3.6m flock**

By Ruth Gledhill and Alan Hamilton

Leaders issue new commandments on how to fight poverty and climate change  
HONOUR thy father and thy Mothers' Union, and the meek may yet inherit some kind of Earth.

Thou shalt abhor Kenyan green beans, nor shall ye drive to the shops when you can get the bus. Thou shalt turn thy central heating down and thy television off at night, and shouldst thou fly thou shalt plant a tree of penitence to offset thy carbon emissions. Thereby might the planet be saved.

The Mothers' Union, a powerful Christian pressure group of 3.6 million members within the worldwide Anglican Communion, has issued its own Ten Commandments in a new drive to help the world's poor and to fight against climate change. It takes as its text the Old Testament prophet Micah, who urged the Israelites to "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God".

Instead of tablets of stone the union, founded in 1876, with 122,000 members in the UK, and not to be confused with the Women's Institute, has produced a campaign booklet, *Fair Enough?*, which lists ten small but effective ways in which members can mother the Earth back to good health.

Christian mothers and fathers, it says, must change the way they shop in order to change the world for the better.

Suggestions include shopping by public transport, refusing to buy out-of-season fruit and vegetables flown halfway around the world — unless they carry a Fairtrade label — buying less meat and more second-hand clothes, and re-using plastic shopping bags. Mothers en masse can make a difference, the union believes.

## **The Mothers' Union Ten Commandments or "You Musts"**

- ◆ Turn off televisions and other electrical equipment at the mains
- ◆ Use efficient light bulbs
- ◆ Use computers less
- ◆ Turn down central heating by one degree centigrade
- ◆ Reduce plane travel
- ◆ Use public transport
- ◆ Buy second-hand clothes and other goods
- ◆ Switch to ethically registered banks and investments
- ◆ Use local shops which stock Fairtrade vegetarian and organic produce
- ◆ Re-use and recycle everything where possible

Quoting Bible verses such as Proverbs xxxi, 9, which exhorts believers to defend the rights of the poor and needy, the organisation says that members need to make sacrifices in their lifestyles, and to challenge the capitalist mantra that all economic growth is good. "Living for justice is different from charity," the union says in its booklet. "Charity may bring temporary relief to people in poverty but it still keeps rich and powerful people in control."

It urges members to read up on which companies adopt Fairtrade policies. "A Nike jacket costs £100 in a London shop, but only 57p of that goes to the Bangladeshi women who make it," the union claims, noting that nearly half the world's population lives on less than £1 a day.

The campaign comes with a new "service for justice" liturgy, in which members in Anglican communions nationwide will be asked to write down pledges in the presence of Yahweh, the Hebrew God of the Old Testament, promising to drive less, fly less, turn off electrical equipment at the mains and refuse foreign produce which has its own season in Britain.

Although the Right Rev Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, recently characterised taking to the skies as a symptom of sin, the union is not calling for an outright boycott of flying. Trish Heywood, the organisation's world president, recently flew to visit Anglican communities in the South Pacific, but then travelled mainly by boat around the islands of Melanesia. Reg Bailey, the first man in the union's 130-year history to hold the post of chief executive, said: "Travel is an inevitability of modern life. What we are trying to get our membership to understand is that there are small things that individuals can do that can make a difference to the impact we have on the world."

He underlined the example of fruit and vegetables. "We seem to have this expectation that we have a right to all food products at all times of the year. We grow perfectly good green beans in the right season over here. We do not need them out of season. People say we should help Kenya's balance of payments, but I am not sure the money reaches the most marginalised."

Peaches and strawberries imported from around the world could be grown perfectly well in Britain in the right season. "I think we would all appreciate strawberries more if we ate them only in the short English season," Mr Bailey said.