

ECONOMIC DISCIPLESHIP: VULNERABILITY TO LIBERATE THE VULNERABLE

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Abstract

Jesus' call is to an incarnational lifestyle *that results in* announcing good news of liberty from oppression, an eternal Jubilee (Luke 4:18, 19). In the economic realm this involves living out ten principles of economic discipleship. Training pastors to teach these, liberates their people from economic oppression, and enables the pastors to serve instead of oppress. As these teachings multiply, slums are transformed. Our choosing vulnerability *in order to* proclaim Jubilee results in setting free the vulnerable.

As poor, yet making many rich (II Cor. 6:10).

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; to heal the sick; to bind up the brokenhearted; to set at liberty the captives; to declare the acceptable year of the Lord (the year of Jubilee). (Luke 4:18,19).

It was a dark evening. No street lamps for the electric company hadn't been paid off. We were sitting at a log table where they had asked me if I could lead them in Bible study. I asked the oldest if he could read for us, "I forgot my glasses, perhaps my granddaughter could read." We all understood (the other five drunkards, the granddaughter and this skinny young missionary) - he couldn't read. But she delighted us with her reading.

After this first drunkards Bible Study on the gospel of John, I said, "You know, when Christians meet we always give an offering. What if we each put in a peso each week, then after three weeks we can decide what to do with it. They liked the idea and soon had elected a treasurer who would not take the money because his dignity was too important. Three weeks later they had turned to the Lord – for if the Lord comes to sit with you as a drunkard, what other response could there be.

“ What should we do with the offerings?” asked the treasurer, proudly showing it had now having grown to 18 pesos.

“Lets give it to Aling _____. She is very old and has only one chicken left.”

*Thus began the giving pattern at the foundation of the church. Before conversion, oikemenia involves oeconomic sharing. The church is a fee-
lowship (old English for half shares in a cow). In the weeks after the
decisions were to give money to a pastor, then to buy a Bible between
them...*

The incarnational model that happened as a cluster of us followed Jesus into the slums in the 1970s has multiplied to several global movements of incarnational urban poor workers. One good friend has linked these under the rubric of the New Friars, following St Francis the preaching friar. (Christianity Today said this is like the new monastics but I don't see many preaching monastics in missions!). Again and again, I have to instruct workers not to take moneys with them into the slums beyond their basic necessities, so that if there is a need, they learn to pray and seek God to answer. Thus, the incarnation, and the vulnerable lifestyle it implies, is a glorious principle I have lived and will die for. Jim's highlighting these elements in his work and this network is a refreshing breeze against a current going the other direction. The now many hundreds of workers living among the poor in the slums have borne much fruit as Jesus promised – he was not stupid.

So what can I add to the discussion. A challenge to think further.

For while this is my pilgrimage in obedience, Jesus' call was never the incarnation.

That was simply process.

The aim is never just *Vulnerable Mission*.

That is only one step out of glory into the cesspits of Kibera slums.

Jesus' goal was never to be a babe in a manger of a slum for the rest of eternity.

Rather he came to preach. Good News. To the poor.

That good news includes healing, liberty from oppression, freedom from poverty.

To set people free is to see slums transformed.

He left his disciples to live in chosen apostolic poverty in order to preach and make disciples, to disciple the nations, to bring the peoples under his authority. To suffer the poverty of the slums in order that he bring the slums under his authority – so they are no more. To choose to have no place to lay their head, in order to bring land rights under his authority so all have a place to lay their head. (I am not with you for I am working to form a land rights network in India this week.)

Vulnerability that transforms the vulnerable
and their vulnerabilities,
both redeems the people
and restores the managed created order
in the nature of germinated seeds.

This is a question of how do we understand this good news that he came to preach? And of how it relates to Vulnerable Mission? I present this as a crucial theological paradigm for this network. It is a topic that I believe will become central to urban poor mission over the next decade, as the development agencies flounder with their unchanging focus on rural poverty. While the world's population growth all moves to the cities, and they ignore the cities, grassroots movements in the slums will take this good news and multiply it to millions, transforming their poverty, transforming the slums and eventually transforming city structures. But the nature of the good news they take will determine earth's future.

This good news can only be understood if we perceive the linkage between Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61:1 and its linkage back to the Jubilee of Leviticus 25:8-54. The exegetical question is what did his hearers understand when he quoted this verse?

When he declared Liberty, they heard him use the phraseology of the Jubilee, of Liberty. They understood that he was declaring the Jubilee across the nation. They didn't fully understand that he was declaring it now and forever! Indeed following his death, his disciples so

convincingly proclaimed this Jubilee that many rich sold their possessions and gave to the poor, just as the Jubilee commands.

Commanded to blow the trumpet, to announce, he is announcing! They flocked to hear his announcement. Liberty to captives! Freedom for slaves! Declaring a year of equalization, where the means of production are returned to the common people. A year of equalized opportunity. An economic gospel of new economic relationships; a gospel that upends social structures; a gospel that challenges the power structures, for it is a gospel of justice.

Discipleship is about taking these principles of the announced good news and fleshing out that liberation economically, that new social life, the new progressions of justice against oppression.

Ten Principles of Kingdom Economics

We will focus on the economic aspects of this. The economic components of the Jubilee are both based on the principles of Kingdom economics outlined in Genesis 1-4 and derived from customs still utilized today in the southern Sudan regions among ancient tribes. I will simply use a summary diagram here.

Figure 1: *Ten Principles of Kingdom Economics*

Ten Principles of Economic Discipleship				
Principle	Genesis	Jubilee	Gospels & Acts	Epistles
1. The Worth and Dignity of each Individual	Created in God's image		Care for the lame, blind, needy, widows	Core for widows, orphans
2. Creativity	God the creator			Spirit sets free
3. Productivity	Good outcomes	6yrs and 49 yrs of productivity	Parables of multiplying seed as a Kingdom principle	
4. Cooperative Economics	Let "us" make		Common purse, Not a needy one among them	Provide for others
5. Work & Rest	He makes He structures	Sabbath, Jubilee rest	Jubilee come Labour in the gospel	Work with hands (1 Thes 4:11), provide for

	God rests, Sabbath rest			family and for needy Rest
6. Detachment & Simplicity			Matt 6:33	II Tim 6:6-8
7.Redistribut'n for Equality	Abraham tithes	Jubilee –return of land	No needy one Weekly Giving	Global redist'n (2 Cor 8,9) Role of a Deacon
8.Management, Savings &	Manage the Earth, Jubilee cancels debts	Land needs rest	Parables of Stewardship, Debts cancelled	Owe no person, Simplicity
9. Celebration	It was good	Blow trumpet	Worship daily	
10.Land & Property Rights	Each family to own their own Home (including Levites)	Each family to be given back land All to own	Forsake all, yet own home	Provide for Family (1 Tim 5:8)

Liberating Pastors

Pentecostal pastors in the slums - for the Culture of Poverty produces Pentecostal styles (Grigg, 1992a) – do not know this economic good news. Wesley knew it in his formation of small savings cooperatives among his evangelistic Bible Studies. But his descendents, through the Free Methodists seeking that deeper experience, then into the explosion of indigenous Pentecostalism globally, have consistently isolated themselves into seeking the Spirit of power, rather than the Spirit of Creation (Kagawa, 1936), who at the formation of the world was that breath hovering and forming as the Word spoke from the Father.

Pentecostalism transforms (Martin, 2002), but a truncated gospel means truncated discipleship and hence truncated social change. That has not been so of the whole gospel across the centuries.

Into that discipleship vacuum has come a pattern of teaching that oppresses the people with a teaching about tithing and tricksterism about prosperity, if the people give to the pastor, then God will give to the people miraculously. In Uganda there are nine TV stations. On six

there are American Pentecostal preachers teaching this doctrine. Give to me and God will bless you!! What a perversion.

The training of poor pastors in these principles of Jubilee, of economic discipleship, shifts their focus from oppressing their people into a different style of serving their people, helping them become creative and productive, developing progressions of work and rest of management and ownership. Instead of the oppressor, the pastor becomes the servant.

Liberating the People

The principle of creativity and productivity affirmed by the constant teaching of the pastor about the divine worth of each person and their gifts, begins to unlock business creativity in many.

I was teaching our ten principles of economics (Grigg, 2010) to a cluster of slum pastors in a beautiful slum church with plywood walls and galvanized iron roof in an African city. As I did so, there was heated debate whether to accept this new teaching that was not part of their tradition.

As I spoke of the first principles in the scripture of creativity and productivity inherent in the nature of God, one brother at the back became excited. “I taught these things. Now my congregation all has jobs.” Everyone rejoiced in true Pentecostal style. “But there is a problem.” A pregnant pause in the hallelujas! “No-one comes to church anymore, they are all working on Sunday!”

“Ah!!” I spoke into the silence, “You forgot to teach principles three and four: work and rest.”

So the discussions continued till over the next years they trained pastors in 168 churches with the Biblical patterns of economics. Pastors began to help their churches start small

businesses. Some of the businesses blossomed. Others failed for lack of technical skill, but the principles remained in their teaching and practice. As businesses developed, the giving increased. The oppressors (pastors) now were the servants! Those served now became the blessers! The churches have continued in a steady growth and multiplication. One expects that over time this holistic gospel now being preached in place of pure hyper-spirituality will increasingly bear fruit not just in conversion and church growth, but in economic uplift.

It may be the lack of concurrent training in business skill required in a modern city will preclude such an outcome – a few years is too short to fully test that. Which raises an interesting conundrum for vulnerable mission in the city – we enter communities without carrying wealth, avoiding dependency. But the city itself has dependencies between the upper and lower economic circuits. Do we leave the young believers to negotiate these themselves, struggling to overcome the barriers or does the church collectively (and that requires bridging unity across independent congregations into networks and perhaps denominations), seek ways to create educational processes in urban skills, management skills, cooperative economics...? Our answer with this learning network – has been to let the ferment of the economic teachings of the Kingdom take root by itself. The cooperative processes generate their own wealth, but skills are not accessible. As various experiments have multiplied, the leaders have brought alongside them expertise in small business development. This is part of the culture of cities, the increasing of skills levels. Inherent in the cultural mandate of Genesis mastery of the earth, this is appropriate. Economic discipleship must run parallel to such cultural trends, must work with what is godly, confront the oppressions that enter into such processes of rapid change, and create alternative Biblically based economic processes.

Cooperative Economics – Replicating the “Usness of God”

Central to these principles is cooperative economics. Poor slum dwellers have no money, right! But collectively they do have money! If they bring together a cooperative and put in money each week, soon there is capital for one to start a business, then the next and soon all.

The principle of cooperative economics (derived from God as an “Usness”) then becomes the vehicle of capital formation that sets people free - just as Jesus’ economic gospel of the Jubilee says it would. Kagawa utilized this to revolutionize Japan’s culture as he evangelized millions (Kagawa, 1936). This becomes the foundation for whole new economic structures birthed in the gospel and discipleship across the urban poor world.

Negative Dependency or Positive Reciprocity

This cooperative economics however never leaves the missionary isolated. I was reading through Glenn Shwartz’ books on dependency and wondering why I have seen it but not experienced much of it. Partly that is because I have been too poor to have much to give. Likely because I am not smart enough. Partly because I have to keep moving on. Every three months starting a new church or mission or movement, so it is difficult to end up with dependency. But as I reflected on Manila, I realized there is not a problem of dependency. The culture revolves around a framework of reciprocal economic relationships, and since I am intermarried to it, with numerous god-children and compadres, when someone is in need, then it is natural to give and they do the same for me. There is a simple relational ebb and flow as we have more or less. Dependency is perhaps a negative Westerners view of the positive dynamic of reciprocal relationships. Reciprocity seems very Biblical. In Filipino culture it is called *utang na loob*, an inner sense of gratitude. I will always be in debt to my Filipino co-labourers – and they to me.

Diaconal Training

I was in the slums of a city, meeting with a cluster of ninety-five Pentecostal slum pastors¹. I began to teach on principles of training leadership. This takes five days. Every day asking, “who are the leaders you are training?” On the first day they wrote down their two elders. Nobody has taught them Ephesians 4: 11, 12 that a pastor’s job is to train. They believe they are pastors and the people are to fund them. Each week with few people they put more and more pressure on them to give so they are able to live. On day two I asked them again. They wrote down their two elders. On day three I met with the pastors’ wives. As I asked them how they would engage the community, they knew exactly what to do in the community. When this was shared with their husbands, they were both amazed at the quality of their wives and ashamed that they had not respected their wisdom enough. Then I taught about deacons and deaconesses, for the role is both male and female. As they heard this they began to identify who were the potential deaconesses and deacons in their congregation. Suddenly their list of trainees had expanded. By the end of the week they have seven or eight on their list and proudly stand and talk of them. Now instead of fleecing the flock they are going back to train them.

So what is this teaching about deaconesses? Deacons and deaconesses have the responsibility for the economic development of the people in the congregation. In today’s language, we call it an economic development worker, or small business advisor. They are to care for the social needs of their congregation. Today it is called a social worker. They are involved in the distribution to the communities needs. This is called a community development worker. Each of these are specialized roles that need training. The pastor’s role is to bring the

¹ This pattern of training can be found at www.urbanleaders.org/grassroots.

biblical foundations for such training, then to make sure they have access to specialists in these areas.

Training of people in this teaching and then in the practical processes that go with it is the core of a new wave of diaconal training across cities. The churches have deacons, but don't use them. And the idea of a deacon as one who catalyzes members in the arenas of business development, productivity, creativity, economic sharing is such a new set of paradigms that it can set whole movements free into new dimensions of ministry multiplication. Pastors become deacon trainers who become people trainers. As the deacons train the people, the economic income of the church increases and the pastor receives a better title. By serving, the oppression is inverted. This is transforming the slums.

Vulnerable to Destroy Vulnerability

Vulnerable mission is a good but weak idea, if it is simply an idea expanding on the incarnation. Vulnerable mission must not leave the people vulnerable, but in the simple teachings of the scripture brings to them Christ the integrator of the material world. This is indeed a Jubilee – this fullness of the Kingdom – his rule over the social, economic, political and spiritual spheres in each community. The vulnerable apostle is not to leave behind vulnerable pastors and poverty stricken urban churches, but pastors leading their people out of vulnerability. The key is in the training of pastors in economic discipleship which as they train their people sets them free.

As the apostle Paul says, we are, “As poor, yet making many rich” (II Cor. 6:10).

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