

November 2011

Occupy Christmas!

The Occupy movement continues rippling as we head into the holidays. From the Arab world to the U.S., 2011 has become a year of growing awareness that 99% are continually out voted while the 1% get their way. This maldistribution of wealth is distorting and corrupting government in the U.S. so drastically that economist Joe Stiglitz said, earlier this year, that we have a government “of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%.” As a result, many of the 99% are now seeing whether occupying might not be a more effective and democratic exercise of power than voting.

The disparity shapes the holiday season as well. Holiday festivities among the 1% differ greatly from those in the 99%—especially those in the lower half. Chants and songs of the movement are likely to mingle with Christmas songs this year.

There is one old, old Christmas song, however, with lyrics that already fit alongside the chant, “we are the 99%.” It is Mary’s song. It would be great if artists in the Occupy movement would give us new street versions of Mary’s song—a poem that filled her with humility, joy, and awe as she pregnantly awaited the birth of her baby. Lest we’ve forgotten how it unabashedly declares that her child will rearrange power, privilege, and wealth, here are some of the words: “My soul magnifies the Lord,” she began. Then, a few lines later, she emphasized that he will bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly; he will fill the emptiness of the poor but send the rich away empty (Luke 1: 46-53).

For Mary the focus was redistribution and it gave her great joy. Her song disagrees with the consumerist interpretation that makes giving the lynchpin of the holiday season. The consciousness of the one in her womb would teach that wealth belongs to creation. When it is held by people, it must be held in amounts that assure sufficiency for all creatures. Similarly, power belongs to the Creator who expresses it in the waves and the weather, in microbes and in birthing new life. When power is held by people, it must therefore be exercised for right relationships among all life. That’s something to sing about! Mary’s song fits with Occupiers everywhere. It’s a song for the 99%.

Mary’s song is a pointed reminder of the chasm between Christmas as told in the malls and Christmas as based in the story of Jesus. The two

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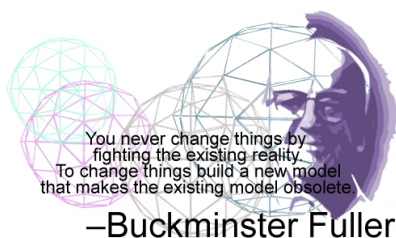
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stories clash. Our efforts to merge them will inevitably mean that the malls' version will win over the version that excited Mary. Not that we must shun every part of the malls' version and seek some pure form for the season in the song of Mary. But let's be clear that the two conflict and represent completely different economies and world views. Mary's economics goes right after the grotesque disparity expressed by the 1% - 99% slogan. The 1% redistribute upward; Mary's redistribution is downward.

In a book with the mischievous title, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Places*, author Jon Pahl unwraps the religion of the malls. It's a religion in which people participate through the hands-on activity of buying gifts. From ads to songs, the message is reinforced that Christmas is a time of giving. Giving, of course, means store-bought gifts, wrapped and ribboned. We're reminded to give only the best, the perfect gift for one we love. The saint of the holy-day is a draw for children and parents as we participate in the mythology of giving. Mary's focus on redistribution of wealth and power is utterly foreign.

Last year, leading up to Christmas, five articles on the JEM website unwrapped Christmas in the economic paradigm of Mary, shepherds, angels, and Jesus. These can be easily found there for your use this year if you missed them in 2010. Go to <http://jubilee-economics.org/title/> and scroll through the titles to find the five on "Unwrapping Christmas in a Different Paradigm."

In addition, five more pieces will appear starting at Thanksgiving this year. These will be about the unholy family of Christmas, focusing on the scandalous presence of four women in Jesus' family tree when Hebrew genealogies of the time were always and only men. Why would Matthew do that in his Gospel? And how did it help him communicate that with the birth of Jesus a new expression of consciousness infused with God's way of thinking and being came into the world?

Please use them as we join together in making Christmas a season in which we go deeper into an economy that fits our planet. The Christmas of the malls requires many planets. Finally, watch for the Common Good podcast coming Dec. 1 on "Engaging One's Own Privilege and Class." It will rhyme with Mary's song.

Four Suggestions for a Jubilee Christmas

1. Turn toward festivals of the heart and soul that exhibit elegance in a whole different way. Keep the hype low-key; expectations realistic. Refocus on the simple pleasures and authentic moments. Let them ooze with their own uplifting energies. Notice them. Monitor your spirit. Be present to Mystery, to the Holy. What is your heart saying? Share it. Play. Celebrate to scale. No debt. Avoid austerity along with excess. Know who you love and connect. If we do these civilization's artificial standards of costly celebration and consumptive festival pale in comparison.
2. Talk with someone about parts of the Jesus story that are typically left out of Christmas. Or re-tell familiar ones and give them a new twist. For example, take Mary's song of excitement and devotion and really pay attention to how it slams class and praises redistribution from the wealthy class to all peoples. Giving is not the heart of Christmas or any of the holidays of the season. Redistribution of wealth is. Occupy Christmas!
3. Unwrap Christmas, Hannukah, Solstice, Kwanzaa—all of them or any of them—in a paradigm connected to nature and cosmos. It's a paradigm that's much, much bigger than civilization's holiday practices. For example, give some attention to the Solstice theme of light reversing the darkening of the world.
4. Gifts of Fair Trade items contribute to redistribution. Fair Trade is an economic model akin to Mary's song. Listen to JEM's two Common Good podcasts on Fair Trade.

Fair Trade Continues to Change Economics of Rich and Poor

Podcast Episode 18: Coffee as a Virtue

Stephan vonKolkow and Laurie Britton, co-owners of the cleverly named Cafe Virtuoso (cafevirtuoso.com), believe in delivering quality coffee and tea products primarily to wholesale customers. Their product line is all organic, and since October is Fair Trade month, we wanted to talk to them about that. How did Fair Trade look to them as businesspeople with a bottom line to mind?

It turns out to be a bit more expensive, yes, but it was hard to turn down since their experience at farmer's markets taught them that individual customers were asking more and more for Fair Trade product. Seeing the demand, they in turn led the way with their wholesale customers, a victory for Fair Trade as more and more vendors will be moving FT product at an increasing scale that bodes well for FT to be a sustainable model.

Stephen and Laurie each give personal accounts of how they started Cafe Virtuoso, how they educate customers on the products, the pros and cons of Fair Trade's certification, and the trends in the industry.



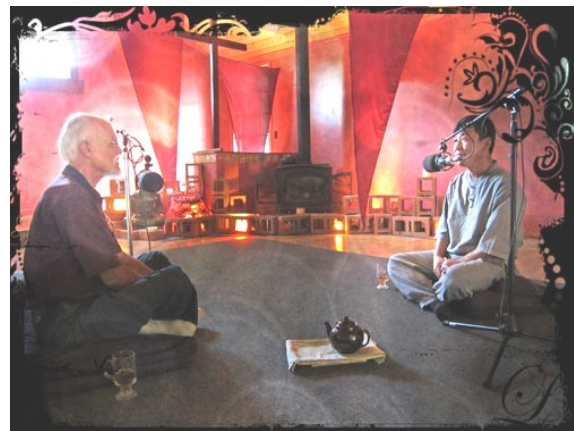
Stephan vonKolkow and Laurie Britton of Cafe Virtuoso with Lee Van Ham

To listen to Podcasts 18 and 19, visit our website at jubilee-economics.org/podcast.

Housing Designed for Community

Podcast Episode 19: When a House is More Than a House

Sung and Myra Sohn, upon arriving in the States from their native Korea, went right to work in an architectural firm (Sung) and a pharmacy (Myra). But the frantic and disjointed rhythms of American life, plus seeing the Americanization of their two children, drove them to seek a different way. They envisioned an alternative housing arrangement that would share life and have a common spiritual practice with other residents and guests.



Lee Van Ham and Sung Sohn

Sung's theological studies, coupled with his ability to design a living space, helped them to articulate and build according to their vision for a household open to interfaith and ecologically friendly living at Myra House where the land was treated with loving respect and the entire property was viewed as one organism. But financial problems put the Sohn's alternative vision in jeopardy, so they dreamed some more and found out how to go into business using the same values as those that governed their household; the new store, Ecoterra, was the perfect marriage of Sung's theologically informed approach to living and working space and Myra's emergence as a pharmacist able to work with both Western and Eastern pharmaceutical practices.

Myra House and Ecoterra point the way toward how to do housing in a way that leaves the land and community in a better state.

**Suggestion for January 1, 2012:
Start a 30 Day Journey into Jubilee**

“There’s a lot on your website. I’d like to go deeper into understanding jubilee by using your website—reading something from it every day for 30 days. Could you give me a 30 day guide?” What a good idea! We’d never thought of it!

But once that request came to JEM board member, Dan Swanson, we quickly went to work on it. Now it’s available for everyone. It’s as free and quick as one click on your computer. Your guide is ready for you at the bottom of the homepage of our website. It’d be a great way to start the new year!

Here’s what you can expect from this 30 day trip through jubilee land. An intro to a sustainable, alternative jubilee economy; Jubilee’s Indigenous and biblical roots; Why people who want control avoid the jubilee (Clue: it’s too democratic and interdependent); How to increase our contemporary practice of jubilee as a living alternative during the continuing Great Recession and aftermath; How it cares for creation. After a one month trip, you will

be in a space of greater awareness and conviction about living sustainably. You will have a sense of greater interconnection with others committed to living jubilee. The more we are able to live jubilee, the more empowered we feel to go even further. It is a challenging, invigorating spiritual practice.

From the network...

When JEM’s president, Douglas Clegg, sent a letter this past summer to Steve Gehring, thanking him for his decade plus of pro bono work, he received this message in return:

Doug, your letter was in the mail this morning. What a nice way to start Monday. I love being part of the JEM family. I was there at the birthing and have enjoyed it since. I’m sure you know that Lee and I go back to about 1973—wow, that probably makes us ancient. Anyway, thanks so much for the nice note and the kind thoughts. Best, Steve.



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