



MentorNet #59

## THE DEMON OF SOPHISTICATED DEPENDENCY

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Wise relief and development workers avoid helping the poor in ways that build dependency. It is well documented how careless handouts make the poor lose initiative and self-respect; many begin to depend on others' generosity, and greed moves them to lie about their needs. However, this grave error is not unique to those who serve the poor. Church and mission history reveals that dependency is just as common, and far more destructive, among churches and believers who are not poor. The demon of 'Sophisticated Dependency' is an invisible member of the advisory board of many churches, mission agencies and seminaries. Two major problems arise.

**Problem #1.** This demon always whispers the same lie, 'There's not enough money to do that.' He blinds believers to the fact that they have needlessly let a lack of material resources force them to violate God's commands. For examples:

- *Believers believe that fully supported pastors are the only legitimate ones.* This lie stifles many church planting movements, because finances—as always—are limited. A material barrier needlessly becomes a spiritual barrier. Leaders can just as easily commission and mentor self-supported, or partially-supported, lay pastors, as churches commonly did a hundred years ago as well as in New Testament times, to keep right on extending Christ's work without any slowdown.
- *Bible schools and seminaries sometimes limit missionary training* that would have the strategic effect of reaching thousands for Christ, because Sophisticated Dependency whispers in educators' ears, 'There's not enough money to do that' when they could apply all their brain power to arrange volunteer mentoring to train missionaries in obedience to Jesus' Great Commission. Often the same educators find enough money to erect ornate buildings, not to mention their own comfortable houses. Opulence wins out over obedience!
- *Mission agencies sometimes let limited funds needlessly dictate the extent of their outreach.* Mission history abounds in cases where, because of revolution or financial crisis, the flow of dollars from the West ceased and—lo and behold!—churches, liberated from the demon of Sophisticated Dependency, multiplied far beyond what the missionaries had dreamed. For example, Mao in China forced church buildings to close, so believers met in homes where non-paid lay pastors led tiny flocks; as a result, many millions have come to Christ."

Every theological school that becomes accredited must raise its academic standards for those who can be students. Those standards keep most Christian workers out of the schools. The demon of 'Sophisticated Dependency' whispers into educators' ears, "You must maintain the pursuit of excellence!" Since the vast majority of gifted apostles, prophets, evangelists,

shepherds and teachers cannot afford to earn requisite academic credentials, they cannot attend those schools. Those who have the credentials, but not enough money to pay fees, become dependent on scholarships and stipends, or they go deeply in debt to pay school fees with no guarantee that they will be able to pay their debts. This is a form of financial enslavement.

**Solution #1.** Thus, those who train church planters and shepherds in ever-expanding church planting movements must ensure that “generations” of mentors are set up and keep extending, wherever new churches get started. Most mentors will be local leaders and shepherds who train others, in turn, according to the model of Exodus 18 and 2 Timothy 2:1-2. Where mentoring chains grow, both mentors and their apprentice learners continue to earn their own living; they do not go farther away than they and their flocks can afford to send them.

**Problem #2.** Frank Viola\* has identified several practices of pagan origin that rich churches and missions have adopted, practices that have no basis in the New Testament. These include chapels and buildings, paid clergy and evangelists, special costumes and electronic media. Wherever the demon of ‘Sophisticated Dependency’ requires such expensive objects and workers, the workers themselves often seek income and funding from other organisations and from getting the Christians to pay tithes and make frequent money offerings. This, in turn, has led to many abuses including fraudulent reporting about ministry success as well as untrue theology about God and money. This happens in every country, not only in developing nations.

**Solution #2.** Thus, those who envision whole countries, regions, languages and tribes becoming disciples of Jesus must introduce practices, methods, materials and equipment that local workers and believers can find, afford, imitate and pass on to others, rapidly. This may require that believers gather in their own homes and other venues, and that they keep starting many little fellowships. As a rule of church multiplication, never require new churches and workers to adopt any practice or method that they cannot afford and cannot perform without big budgets and lengthy training. Rather, teach all new workers to help seekers and new believers to experience the real Presence of Jesus Christ in their midst and to depend mostly on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to accomplish lasting work.

Let Christian leaders form a tight circle, hold hands, and agree before God in Jesus’ name, to detect and to bypass blockages imposed by the demon of ‘Sophisticated Dependency.’

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\* Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity* (BarnaBooks, 2008).