

On Being Set Free: Relational Truthfulness and Globalization¹

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Introduction: A Portrait of Vulnerability

Ana was distressed. The plantation owner had sold his land, and Ana's entire family—along with the others that for generations had harvested coffee—had to get off the land where they had been born and had raised their families. The land was not theirs after all... All they could do was pack up their meager belongings and rent rooms in the city. Ana felt lucky when she got a job in a *maquila* (a textile factory) a two-hour bus ride away. She had not even complained about having to get up 3 am to prepare a meal for the family before

1. Though this paper was originally presented in 2007, the subject matter remains pertinent. It has undergone slight revisions to reflect more current events.

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boarding her bus, about only having a fifteen-minute break in her ten-hour workday, or even when her husband had decided to venture north, to the United States, in search of opportunity. Strange people had been around the factory during the last couple weeks, but she had thought nothing of it. Until that morning. She arrived as usual, only to find hundreds of women outside the factory. A heavy chain hung on the gate and a small sign read: “*Por motivos de fuerza mayor esta fábrica ha cerrado*” (literally, “For reasons of ‘major force,’ [forces beyond our control] this factory has been closed”). What now?

Again and again the “invisible hand” of “major force” had marked the destiny of Ana’s family. First, coffee prices had bottomed out. Business was no longer profitable, so the landowner had decided to sell his land to a developer, giving but a week’s notice to the laborers and their families who had slaved away for his family for decades. Later, union leaders began to pressure factory owners for workers’ rights and benefits. Business was no longer profitable, so the company closed shop in order to set up camp in a country with less “restrictive” conditions, giving workers no prior notice.

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Ana’s story of poverty and vulnerability is illustrative of the plight of millions in El Salvador, in Latin America, in the poor countries of the world, and in poor sectors of society within rich nations. And this story is not set in some distant, prehistoric, or pre-technological past.

Rather it is a factor of inclusion in the current globalized world system, one that has so often been hailed as *the* means for *all* people in *all* nations to become prosperous and, hence, free.

This article proposes that freedom is the fruit of truthful relations rather than a product of the current economic globalization. Support for that thesis is offered by means of an evaluation of the benefits, drawbacks, and potential of globalization. Finally, possible next steps are recommended for churches seeking to incarnate