

Sister Who's Perspective

Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #93 March 2007, copyright

Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

At its most basic level, economics is simply an exchange of contrasting abundances to redistribute goods and services, ideally so that all needs can be met in legitimate ways. The primary question, therefore, is what to do when this ideal does not happen and how much are we even aware of such inequities?

The choices we make within such moments combine to form the world in which we live. The primary focus of our lives becomes the divine entity we worship and our chosen purpose.

Ultimately, life is about living rather than possessing because our mortality prevents us from taking anything with us other than our souls, our memories, and our love. Everything else will quickly evaporate like morning dew, as soon as we are gone. The primary question, therefore, is how much good can I do with the resources which have been temporarily entrusted to my care?

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

The Economics of Interconnectedness

When I first titled the articles of this newsletter a few weeks ago, I thought this would be merely an opportunity to intellectually address relationships of give and take and interdependency within our world, in a more or less emotionally safe manner--but when is life ever truly safe?

Yesterday I was present when the body of a good friend was discovered, following an incidence of suicide which presumably occurred sometime during the past week. It is my understanding that my friend was despondent about not being able to find adequate employment by which to maintain her current apartment and standard of living. The last time we had spoken by phone, perhaps a month before, I encouraged her to investigate every possible option and to be as adaptable as possible. Evidently, she was unable to truly believe in any positive alternative and was not able to tolerate the possibility of losing what she believed she owned.

I have often said that ultimately all we really

have is each other and I have often lamented that I live within a society which seems to view people as being every bit as disposable as fast-food restaurant packaging. This would be so convenient, if only it were true. It would not, however, be congruent with unconditional love.

Now all future contributions by this particular friend to the world and to life are beyond our reach. We will have to carry on without this person, whose absence impoverishes us all to varying degrees.

Within the larger scope of human relationships, a company cannot charge more for its goods than it pays its employees, because the ability to purchase depends upon a proportional income. Money travels in a circle from employer/seller to employee/buyer and back again in a never-ending flow analogous to the blood circulating within our bodies. When a blood clot impedes circulation, injury and possible physical death are probable. Similarly, when money is hoarded or when housing costs are inflated and adequate employment is lacking, members of humanity begin to suffer. In both cases, if these parts do not survive, the survival of the whole is questionable.

Everyone has to be somewhere. Does the world we have created allow this? If not, how will we resolve this? How many deaths are required to awaken us to the economic crisis wreaking havoc and destruction throughout our country and our world? On the street where I currently live, about a third of the residences are now empty and dark at night, foreclosure and unemployment being primary adversaries.

If we cannot love others, then we do not love ourselves either, because preserving the lives of others ultimately preserves our own. We have the ability to save each other and to save everyone--but only if we work together. There are some things God will not do for us, because the opportunity to make a positive difference is a divine gift and divine intervention would take this gift back before it had a chance to do its work.

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The Economics of Isolation

Perhaps especially because I grew up around farmers and working-class people, I often heard self-sufficiency described as a desirable goal and observed many to pursue this in whatever ways they could.

I do continue to strive for this within my own life, but not because I wish to be independent of others. Rather, I have found that a healthy understanding of self-sufficiency is closely aligned with a general practice of living modestly. Ultimately, by such a practice, I avoid asking or expecting the world in which I live to support me in living with more than I need (which would involve taking from someone else, in order to satisfy the demands of my chosen lifestyle).

This discussion reminds me of a simple question often used for moral guidance throughout my childhood: "Who's it hurting?" In many cases, no one was being negatively impacted and the resulting conclusion was to be tolerant of someone else's difference. In some cases, however, this question also functioned as an encouragement to be aware of and sensitive to the needs and life experience of others.

The economics of isolation, ultimately, are about learning to live with unmet needs. Similar to basic economics, however, forcing anyone to live with unmet needs is comparable to repayment of a loan which will someday be due in full. When that time comes, payment will be demanded in full and the resulting conflict may be devastating if those who have profited refuse to do so.

Ultimately the economics of isolation simply postpone but cannot eradicate the basic repayment of debts and rebalancing of inequities which the most basic physical laws of the universe require. This rebalancing does not have to be painful or destructive, however, if we will begin to truly love those who have been living with unmet needs and work together to find equitable and effective solutions. Without a general and effective practice of unconditional love, however, there will quite literally be hell to pay.

From a different perspective, the economics of isolation describe one who is unable to perceive the abundance of the universe at all. Rather, such a person sees only what he or she owns or is able to purchase, as being the limit of possible answers to whatever needs are experienced. With regard to medical care, for example, one who has never had access to the best medical care will

understand certain circumstances to be life-threatening, which are not in fact life-threatening if access to greater medical resources is granted. If someone with such greater resources appears, therefore, the results may seem absolutely miraculous because the prior expectation of limitation is defeated. Very much tied to this consideration is the question of what we each believe to be possible.

If we do not believe that anyone could live more than a decade, for example, after having been diagnosed as having contracted the HIV virus which accompanies AIDS, the blessing of more effective medicines will confront such a person with still being alive when more than a decade has passed. Specifically, we--and that individual--must discover how to go on living.

If we truly love and believe in each other, we will strive to live as long and as fully as we can. Physical death needs no help; it will come in its own time. Living life to its fullest, however, requires true community, complete inclusiveness, and unconditional love. Similarly, when such quality of life is no longer a realistic possibility, rather than allow anyone--even anomalous individuals--to die in isolation, we will create positive, dignified, and loving closure.

I am reminded of a perhaps amusing quip I saw on a poster many, many years ago: "The beatings will continue until morale improves." Similarly, the economics of isolation results in self-sabotaging demands for maintenance and improvement. Survival becomes redefined as a demand which current resources cannot provide.

The reason that the economics of isolation exist at all, however, is that the price which has been set for being able to meet all of one's needs, is too often too high. The notion of "selling one's soul" to an employer, for example, is still commonly practiced and has many commonalities with historical institutions of slavery. Because its appearance is not quite so ugly or obvious, however, I continue to encounter many people who advise me that this is simply an unavoidable characteristic of the present age of humanity.

Because I understand, however, what a valuable and precious thing my soul is, that it is a gift from God for which nothing else will effectively substitute and an essential element within any relationship of love, selling my soul is something I simply cannot do.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

The Economics of Unconditional Love

Perhaps the greatest challenge to all of us living after the historical phenomena referred to as "the Enlightenment," is that unconditional love is--on the surface at least--so irrational. For anyone unfamiliar with the term, the Enlightenment was that moment or period a few hundred years ago when human reason instead of divine revelation became the general standard by which humanity interpreted and organized its world. Perhaps literally hundreds of books have been written on this subject, however, so that is a grossly oversimplified explanation.

It must be remembered, however, that virtually every system of religion or spirituality which has been recorded or described within all of human history, includes mysteries, statements, stories, assertions, and revelations which go far beyond the limits of human reasoning and rationality. Additionally, virtually every major religion began long before the time of the Enlightenment. Jesus, for example, did not live within a world that any conception of what the Enlightenment would be. Prominent within the spiritual mysteries all of these diverse systems of religion and spirituality include, is the challenge of unconditional love.

On one hand, if one perceives only the small world of one's immediate experiences and perceptions, unconditional love makes no sense. Such love includes expressing benevolence and understanding toward enemies, adversaries, competitors, and complete strangers.

On the other hand, if one perceives the larger world within which all of life and history are inextricably intertwined and interconnected, unconditional love is the only thing that does make any sense. Such love directs, for example, that in order for the forest to survive, each tree within the forest must receive whatever nourishment and support that individual tree needs. Such love is also the essential ingredient within virtually every

instance of healing or restoration.

What makes the economics of unconditional love all the more challenging, however, is that this dynamic is only concerned with giving and not with keeping track of whether or not others give back. This does not mean, however, that no significant amount of wisdom is needed. Giving what cannot be appreciated, for example, may be analogous to what Jesus called, "throwing pearls before swine." I don't think this was a negative statement about swine, however, but rather an encouragement to provide swine with what is most helpful to their growth and happiness; in other words, unconditional love. Pearls are obviously of very little use to swine, for any purpose whatsoever.

In this time of economic obsession, any and every sort of giving is often described as an investment, quickly followed by the recommendation to invest wisely. Unfortunately this often means that one should expect to see a good return in response to one's investment. While in and of itself this is not a bad idea, it does discourage one from investing anywhere or in any way which does not produce an observable and measurable benefit. Humanity would be in extremely desperate circumstances indeed, had God applied this criteria to us.

Instead, God continues to believe in humanity's ability to love and to grow, in spite of literally millennia of no significant observable progress within humanity as a whole. Similarly, we must trust that every action of genuine and unconditional love is simply the right thing to do, whether or not a positive return on our investment ever becomes obvious.

So I do my best each day to invest in humanity in whatever ways I can, trusting that God sees every act of kindness, love, generosity, or investment (financial, emotional, personal, social, etc.) and that from a perspective higher and broader than my mind is able to comprehend, life and/or the universe is thus somehow better than it would have otherwise been. By the combination of all the seemingly small acts of this sort which I do, I believe I will leave the world a much better place than it was when I first arrived in this life.

The economics of unconditional love basically comes to a circumstance or situation, sees what is needed, and gives what it can because it recognizes that "life is a collaborative effort; we all take turns being the one in need."

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

*"Like any other emotion,
Fear has an important job to do;
it cannot leave until we find the love
which is designed to displace it."*

--Sister Who

The Economics of Peace

Someone once asked how I would suggest preventing terrorism. I responded, "Turn them all into middle-class citizens, so addicted to personal comfort and convenience that all they have to offer is apathy and lethargy. None of the terrorist leadership would be able to find a single recruit."

Although the response was given only in jest, it does seem mostly true that such anti-social movements rely all too heavily on impoverished and uneducated people, perhaps because such people are the most afraid for their survival. As I read somewhere very recently (although I can't remember where at the moment), "People who are afraid are easy to manipulate."

Maintaining peace, therefore, requires that we work together to create a shortage of fear. The most accessible security any of us can have, is being able to really count on each other. The maintenance and functioning of the economics of peace, therefore, are more concerned with finding a way for each and every person to have a home, than with interest rates, repayment plans, or other tools relevant only to the regulation of money and not to its adequate provision.

The economics of peace also recognize, however, that it will require each and every one of us doing our best and all of us working together, to keep such an economy afloat. Phrased another way, we must do our best and then trust God and each other to ensure that doing our best is in fact enough to satisfy whatever needs exist.

To sustain an economy of peace once it has been created, however, modesty, self-sacrifice, and industriousness must not only become characteristic of ourselves but also patterns of behavior we effectively pass along to future generations.

Even when that is accomplished, however, there is no point at which we can legitimately declare, "There, I have done my duty" and sit back to watch for others to complete whatever tasks or challenges are currently present within our individual personal and societal worlds. If God has given us the breath of life for even one more moment, then there is still something important for us to do.

Will we actually do whatever good we can? That is a choice which confronts each of us, each day, within each moment we live.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

On a Personal Note

A photo-shoot last Thursday went very well, hopefully producing all of the necessary photos for a brochure promoting "A Circuitous Journey." This is the award-winning combination of theatre and worship presented within the weekly community chapel service at Iliff School of Theology on March 15 of last year. The presentation has been slightly reconfigured so that it can be presented by a single performer, assisted by an audio recording of all other voices and accompanying music. This audio recording is scheduled to be recorded in mid-April, granting the possibility of presentations occurring anytime thereafter. I also hope at some point to do a more focused and professional recording of this production, as a DVD video recording for sale directly to individuals and/or organizations wishing to add this presentation to their personal and/or organizational libraries.

With regard to the second album of songs, to be entitled "Prayers," I hope to have all preparatory work completed by late May so that the CD album would be available to the general public by the end of summer.

As to completion of a masters degree in theological studies from Iliff School of Theology, my final class is scheduled for a single weekend in mid-April. It is my understanding that degrees will be officially conferred at the beginning of June, thus concluding another major chapter in my life and in my preparation for eventual ministry within the interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center, which remains my ultimate ministerial goal.

As to more material matters of basic needs, the car is running okay but looks like a wreck because personal funds are inadequate to fix the damage which occurred in mid-January. The roof of the house is leaking again, causing the ceiling in the bedroom to sag. Hopefully it will not completely give way before early summer, when various reparative measures can be attempted. Sigh. Onwards and hopefully upwards.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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