

The FutureWorld Association

*Examining the Shape & Culture
of the Future World*

The Culture of Heart Column

by Peter F. Brown

The Economy of Heart

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"Let them eat cake," she grandly proclaimed. For this, the Queen of France was beheaded.

Fast forwarding to recent election years, we heard "it's the economy, stupid."

Certainly no one can deny the profound impact that economics have had on human suffering. I count myself as fortunate that I've experienced some degree of economic deprivation. The night that I stopped at the store on the way home, to buy food for my wife and four children, and had only eight dollars in the whole world to purchase a rather questionable slab of "real meat" for our dinner, is one of the many nights that helped me understand a tiny bit more about humility and want.

My grandmother was born a Swedish Baroness, and although I was raised "poor" by parents who always struggled financially, I grew up day dreaming of the glories of the Falkenbergs of Trystorp. They had a castle, you see, and I liked that.

Since then, I've had the grace to run across some very fine individuals who valiantly tried to teach me that each person has the same value, and has the ultimate destiny to stand as a person of dignity in front of a parental God. One of them was a former Marxist-Leninist who told me that he left the Communist fold out of disagreement with their creed that "what's yours is mine, and what's mine is mine (and maybe a bit for the State as well.)" He much preferred the idea that "mi casa es su casa." His view was heavily influenced by the logic that the Marxist view of man as an "economic animal" was simply incorrect. For him, it boiled down to a "God or no God question."

If God didn't exist, as the Marxists believed, then the economic suffering of the teeming "have-nots" might indeed be assuaged by violent

revolution against the "haves." History, of course, has shown that the vanguard of the Marxist revolution skillfully transformed themselves into a new breed of "haves" -- the Nomenklatura. Shopping at special Moscow stores, the Marxist elite demonstrated that changing one's environment didn't necessarily make one a "new man."

On the other hand, if a God of parental love did exist, then my friend argued that each person automatically gained a unique but equal status as a child of God -- and by extension became a member of a very large global family. This idea was very attractive to me. I never really liked the concept that an orangutan was my uncle, no matter how much Darwin or the script writers of Star Trek insisted to the contrary. And I have to admit that I'm an avid fan of Star Trek.

I'm inspired by the Star Trek view that in their future, greedy monetary gain has been essentially eliminated. Partly through technology, and partly through an unexplained transformation of human nature, there seems to be enough to go around in the Star Trek universe. I think that technology really will help dissolve the "North-South" problem of industrial disparity, and will eventually create a surplus of worldly goods for all to share. Technology alone, however, won't erase poverty and economic suffering.

Human nature, and the various evils that lurk in the heart of man, are the prime stumbling blocks to a global economic heaven. Marxists thought that they could whip the evil out of people. Star Trek writers have proposed that the human race will simply "evolve" to a better plane of existence -- a finer, and more noble animal. A sentient animal, but still an animal, for in the far reaches of the stars, there was no God to be found. At best, only "worm hole aliens" and politically correct "third world" religions. To mimic Spock, the Star Trek universe is a "fascinating, but illogical" view of reality -- if one examines all the evidence that God does indeed exist.

A more "spiritually logical" view is that humankind was created to be an intimate global family of true love. This view, when universally accepted the way that gravity is now accepted, will have a revolutionary impact on human affairs -- including the economy. The flow of money and goods between people will be dominated by "heart" -- the desire to gain joy by giving and receiving love. In fact, the economy of heart already exists in thousands of families around the world. It's an economy that is based on the quality of love between family members.

When a husband and wife love each other with a mature and unselfish love, it's the most natural thing in the world to share money and possessions as they are needed. Individual bank accounts and the hoarding of

personal funds is less attractive than the joy that is produced by naturally caring for the other person's needs. "My" money becomes "our" money, and private ownership is replaced by common ownership and common responsibility. The economy of heart between a loving husband and wife only works well when both parties are equally unselfish, loving and responsible -- otherwise one person's needs will not be met.

I had a number of experiences volunteering for nonprofit groups that amply illustrated the fallacies of socialism. Since things were "owned" by the group, and (in that particular organization) no one was getting paid to specifically care for common property such as vehicles, we found that no one cared for the over-abused cars and vans. Each volunteer, who was working hard in a wonderful fashion, couldn't quite find the time (or interest) to do mundane things like changing the oil, or washing and polishing a vehicle that didn't belong to them. "Some one else will surely do it," was the secret excuse muttered under each person's breath. And yes, alas, I muttered with the best of them.

One would have to conclude from experiences like that that capitalism is much more efficient. When you own your own vehicle, the odds are better that you won't let it get TOO run down. Ownership, in my opinion, is a prerequisite for responsibility to flourish. Owning things "together", however, hasn't yet worked on a grand scale. (Just look at the old Soviet factories.)

Even in a family, we can see a difference between the sense of ownership that a loving husband and wife have toward their family possessions, and the sense of ownership and responsibility that their own children have toward the family's property. Why, just the other day, I was hollering at our three boys about the back yard fence that they had broken. Ah, the joys of parenting.

The variable that transforms socialism or capitalism into the economy of heart is the maturity of each person's unselfish heart of responsibility toward people and material things. Capitalists who are perfectly happy owning their sports cars and piles of ducats can quite nastily turn nature into one large strip mine -- or worse, a shopping mall. Shopping malls are useful things, but do they have to cut down ALL the trees?

Extending the economy of heart from families to a universal level requires that people within one country, and then the world, regard all other people as their family members, centered on the ethic of God-centered unselfish love. It doesn't require the elimination of all other religions except one's own favorite denomination -- but it does require the acceptance of a common standard of heart. The heart of love that regards all people as one's own family completely changes a person's

attitude and actions regarding money and economy. It's an attitude that has very real impact and one that can be initiated without waiting for others to adopt it.

The economy of heart will be built by each person, on an incremental, day by day basis. It will be built as each individual makes monetary decisions based on heart -- quite the opposite of the current creed of "not mixing business with friends and family." Since the economy of heart is based entirely on the precept that each person is indeed a beloved member of my family, our financial actions in relationship to each person will pursue the multiplication of true love rather than profit.

Profit -- the almighty bottom line of business -- has hurt too many people. The excuse that it's "just business" ignores the pain and suffering of competitors destroyed and families ruined. Competition is wrong if it causes our extended family members harm. Opening a Super Store next to a mom and pop owned by my own family member whom I love is an action that should be heartistically impossible. In fact, many people today would hesitate to destroy a business owned by someone they loved. They would find another location for their Super Store, or seek a solution that would be more equitable -- such as offering the small store owner a partnership in the venture.

This might seem radical and impractical -- but I believe that it only seems radical because we're not used to regarding each person as our very own brother or sister whom we love. We step back from the reality of the other person, hold our nose, squeeze our eyes tight shut and proceed to devastate our competitor in the war of business. As the fallen "enemy" jumps from his penthouse window, we pause slightly -- but only slightly. It was, after all, "just business."

Creating the economy of heart can be begun by changing the purpose and standard of each transaction. Although we may be financially damaged in the short run, our willingness to risk and adopt a new economic paradigm will create tremendous social benefit. Even small efforts make an incremental difference over the long term. Tipping a hard-working waitress twenty percent instead of the normal fifteen produces a ripple of generosity that will help create the economy of heart. Examples such as this abound, and can be accomplished with minor cost, but significant invisible gains.

My wife and I once had an experience with a person who unjustly demanded more than the agreed upon price for a service. He initially quoted us a fee of \$100 to do some household work. After the work was about half done, he started complaining and stated that the work was

worth more -- even though it was based on an hourly sum.

Our initial reaction was to feel abused and upset over the grasping nature of his demands. From a legal and ethical point of view, we felt sure of our position, and could have refused his request. For some reason, though, we started looking at him in a different light that day. He lived in a very small apartment, and had suffered economically and spiritually for a long, long time.

It's difficult to give to someone when you suspect that they won't appreciate it -- or even recognize that you gave. When they receive your gift as a sign that "you've finally come around", it's even harder. Sometimes, people have been suffering for so long that their ability to give love is hiding, way down at the bottom of a very deep hole. They've been hungry so often that their life has become a series of attempts to "get" something -- preferably for nothing.

At times like that, the economy of heart seems far, far away.

The good news is that every hole can eventually be filled. Sacrificial love is the most powerful spiritual force in the world. Jean Valjean, the protagonist in "Les Miserables", was transformed by the parental love of a priest who gave to him -- even though it was economically imprudent.

My wife and I looked at the hardworking, unhappy man who desperately wanted more money and had a choice. A new idea (are there any new ideas?) occurred to us that day. If we only gave him what he demanded, we were sure that we would feel bad later. There would be a residue of ill-feeling.

Instead, we gave him what he asked for, and then we gave him extra money, telling him that it was an expression of our appreciation of his hard work. He was surprised and seemed to feel grateful. Our bad feeling was removed, because we had stumbled (oh so very slowly) into the realm of giving, which created a completely different feeling in our hearts.

The economy of heart simply won't work unless we regard other people as our family. It has already worked on a small scale, within many families. History has seen glimmers of it, here and there, in various cultures, such as the practice of barn raising in pioneer days. When Mr. Smith needed a new barn, the neighbors pitched in, knowing that Mr. Smith would help them too. It made sense, and it worked.

I believe that the economy of heart will indeed happen. It won't be

magic, and it won't happen because of banks or the Federal Reserve, or a Presidential signature. It will happen gradually, as each one of us performs our monetary transactions motivated by heart, with the knowledge that each unselfish transaction will create a ripple of heart that will one day become the economic norm.

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