

Valerie Elverton Dixon

September 14, 2009

A Radical Love Economy

God is Love.

The divine mystery, transcendent Other, order in chaos, transrational logic, awesome force, energy that exploded from within itself setting creation in motion is love. It is a supreme extreme love that loves the unlovable, that asks us to dream and to do impossible things. This is the divine presence, foundational substance in which all else is rooted that is with us and in us and that commands us to love each other. This love requires a *caritas* that is open-ended and expansive. It reaches from the core of our own souls to the outer edges of infinity. This love commands a radical love economy.

Economy is the management of resources. It is a stewardship of material goods, of labor and money. And since so much of our waking day goes to our work, earning a living and doing the various tasks that life requires, economy is the management of our lives. A radical love economy is the management of our living and of our resources according to the imperative of love. That imperative is generosity. The paradoxical logic of a radical love economy is that the more we give, the more we receive. And the outpouring, the offering, the libation of our lives living love ought to go to the wretched of the earth, to the poor and to the poor in spirit. We give a gift that cannot be reciprocated, not even by gratitude to us.

Biblical wisdom in the book of Proverbs says: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full." (Proverbs 19:17) Biblical wisdom tells us further in Malachi that when we bring our tithes and offerings into God's storehouse that God will bless us: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." (Malachi 3:10)

The storehouse is the meeting place of the faith community –synagogues, churches, mosques etc. It is the place where people who need help ought to be able to come to find the help they need. Our tithes and offerings finance this help. However, in difficult economic times, the storehouse can also be a place of employment. We know that the tithes pays the salaries and benefits for clergy and for the support staff of the congregation, but it can also pay the salaries of people who can help provide other services – job search assistance, certain medical screenings, legal assistance, stress management classes, conflict resolution – just to name a few.

At this moment, local, state and federal governments in the United States are operating with large budget deficits. Some state and local governments are cutting back on services to the most vulnerable of its citizens. It is the responsibility of faith communities to stand in the gap. This means as economic times become harder, people of faith ought to give more. We may have to give more than our usual tithes and offerings to help meet the need.

Believers are not immune to the economic downturn. However, a radical love economy is an economy that requires faith in God's promises. Common sense tells us to save, and we should. It tells us to pay down debt, and we should. Yet, it does not tell us to give more away. Giving more in difficult economic times is a logic of faith that sees beyond sight and trusts that God, that radical love, is true to itself.

Economic crises happen when the management of national and international resources is out of balance. Gambling greed, irrational exuberance, faith in the fiction that what goes up cannot come down, that price bubbles will not burst, leads to risk taking that goes beyond what the economic system can bear. A crisis of confidence in the markets creeps into our space like noxious air. Fear comes. People retrench. With less demand comes less production; with less production comes more unemployment; with more unemployment people have less money to pay for the basics of life. An anemic economy demonstrates that faith in market forces is misplaced. Even faith in the policy makers in our governments to know how to manage the economy to prevent recession from turning into depression is a misplaced faith. It is idolatry. A radical love economy is faith in God's promises. We test them.

A radical love economy requires community. The individual independence and responsibility that we exercise when times are flush change into a communal interdependence. Our responsibilities to each other become more obvious and more pronounced. This can happen if we are willing to destroy our idols. We see the foolishness of our worship of our various identities. It is foolish to locate our sense of self in a job. If we lose the job, we lose ourselves. Our only safe haven is to become one with radical love and thus to become one with all.

We become the radical love that loves God with all of our hearts and minds and souls. We become the love that loves our neighbor as ourselves and that loves even our enemies. We become the radical love that sees the human incarnation of love in the beggars asking us for change, even when we know that this is their full time job. We become one with the least, the last, the marginal, the forgotten. We become one with them and give with a radical grace because the exigencies of a feeble economy can fall down upon any of us at any moment. And we may be the beneficiaries of our own generosity.