

CREATION CARE

#43, Winter 2023



The World and all that is in it belong to the Lord, the Earth and all who live on it are His! –Psalm 24:1

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Occasional Newsletter with relevant articles on biblical, economic, political & social impacts & their consequences on God's Creation & the Church.

On the Web: nohcob.org, click: Ministries, click: Creation Care

In Creation God brought ordered existence out of chaos and called us to be Stewards who will rightly manage and supervise his handiwork and its applications. To be effective, Creation Care must cover more than physical projects like recycling and fossil fuel reduction. We must also expose and understand the philosophical, political, economic, and human values and systems that create and support acts of environmental degradation. Stewardship of all creation begins in the mind and is fueled by the emotions where all physical action is born. The mind and the emotions that lead to action cannot be molded just by facts, ideas and projects; they must also be reimagined by a transformative faith. These newsletters are dedicated to this broader concept.

RECYCLING IS POPULAR BUT PROBLEMATIC



A new survey shows that 94% of Americans support recycling and 74% believe it should be a top priority, but only 35% actually recycle; how come?

There are a number of reasons. a) Confusion about what is recyclable; b) Drop-off sites are not convenient; c) Confusion about how you get items ready to recycle. d) Conflicting reports about whether or not there are sufficient markets to actually use the recyclables.

Most Americans agree that a ban on single-use plastics would have the greatest impact on reducing plastic pollution. ☩

KEYSTONE PIPELINE'S BIGGEST LEAK YET



There have been 22 previous spills along the Keystone pipeline system since it opened in 2010, but on 12-8-2022, the biggest spill so far, was discovered in Washington County, Kansas, with an estimated loss of over half-a-million gallons! The spill took place by a creek running through pastureland. The

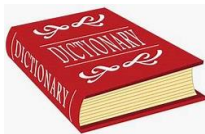
pipeline, nearly 2,400 miles long, carries thick, Canadian tar-sands-oil to refineries in Illinois, Oklahoma, and Texas. A proposed 1,200-mile extension (dotted-line on the map) had been proposed, but President Joe Biden canceled a permit for it, questioning its necessity and citing safety concerns.

Despite the assurance of safety by their builders and owners, pipelines are notorious for their leaks and spills. Total clean-up of the spills is seldom possible, often leaving damage that lasts for decades.



GASLIGHTING

Webster's new word for 2022 is gaslighting. The term has come into popular use in the last few years because of the barrage of misinformation and propaganda being used to confuse and manipulate the public. **The definition:** "psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories, and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's mental stability and a dependency on the perpetrator." ☩



DO WE LIVE TO WORK, OR WORK TO LIVE?

In a letter to a friend in 1784, Benjamin Franklin wrote: "*If every man and woman would work for four hours each day on something useful, that labour would produce sufficient to procure all the necessaries and comforts of life.*"

The pandemic threw many of our customary social and economic practices into chaos, with the result that some stop-gap measures were attempted, such as working at home and working longer hours with fewer work-days, etc. Some of these *emergency measures* have now become economic experiments or accepted practice.

In January 2022, the United Arab Emirates became the first nation to adopt a 4.5-day work week. In February 2022, Belgium allowed workers to choose a four-day week, but with more hours per day; that June the United Kingdom began an experiment with a four-day work week involving 70 companies; four other countries, including the U.S.A., are encouraging companies to adopt a 32-hour work-week with no cut in pay.



These changes, along with many others, require a shift in values and vision. For many years, business has made profit its top priority where workers *sell their time to the company in exchange for money*. For a shorter work week to be a success, there must be what is being called, "*deep-work.*" **Deep-work** is time that is distraction-free so that workers can achieve complete focus. Studies have shown that workers are distraction-free for only two and three hours each day. The most common distractions are talking, moving about, and meetings.

A growing emphasis on work resulted in a 61.8% increase in U.S. productivity between 1979 and 2020, but studies have also shown that there has been a significant decline in civic participation and community engagement since the middle of the 20th century, creating social isolation and a decline in inter-human communication. There has been a corresponding loss in a sense of neighborliness.

The information-mill has moved us away from personal sharing between friends, neighbors, and community leaders to contacts through various forms of the electronic media where the sources of ideas and the accuracy of what is communicated is difficult, if not impossible, to verify and the flow of specific information is often governed by the affluence of the tiny special interest groups who can afford to flood the communication chain, with their message, giving the illusion of popular support.

The crucial question is, can an intensive short work-week free-up our lives and allow us to explore our creative potential, mingle with our neighbors, and rebuild the interpersonal relationships that leads to the community engagement that is so badly needed today? 🍎



The statement, “**HISTORY IS PROLOGUE,**” proclaims the simple fact that what has happened sets the stage for what is happening and what will happen. Just as none of us can escape from the strengths and weaknesses of our genetic make-up, we cannot escape from the influences that the strengths and weaknesses of our history press upon us. Anyone who values the ancient writings recorded in the Bible understands that the actions and ideas of the past are vital for who we are and what we need to do in the present and what we plan for in the future. History, even ancient history, provides many of the influences upon which we build, find support, and the story-lines out of which our lives emerge in the here and now.

Economic and intellectual advantage usually comes, not because we earn it, but because we “fall into it” through factors like birth, ethnicity, and geography. I submit that much in human society has been built on the sands of inequity in which equal opportunity and reward for similar effort do not exist, dooming citizens to an upper and lower class in which movement from one to the other is very difficult. We will live outside of God’s peace and blessing until we aim to establish justice and righteousness in all that we think, value, and do; therefore, this issue of *Creation Care*, is devoted largely to a historical review of what I call the “*Dominant Deficits*” that have created today’s society.

THE DEFICITS THAT CREATED THE LIFE THAT WE LIVE TODAY

The way we live in the world today is dominated by the ancient Greek and western European philosophers and scholars which emphasized individualism, facts, logic, and material prosperity; an outlook which chafes against the spiritual and communal nature of Christianity. Christianity was born in the Middle East, and had a Christocentric center, but its Christocentric foundation was quickly weakened by the Greek/European/American philosophical culture, leading it away from living like Jesus to beliefs about Jesus. Spirituality and trust are the keys to living like Jesus; facts and logic tend to dissect and analyze the faith and produce beliefs about Jesus; which has its place, but not at the center.



Philosophy strives to understand and interpret the meaning and values inherent in what we learn about life and how to wisely use it. What we believe and the ideas that grow out of that belief impact everything on and in the earth.

Materialistic desire and the need for Wisdom often clash because we are willing to act unwisely in order to get what we desire, which creates the need to justify our actions when they are corrupt. The essential question here is: “*What did Western European/American philosophy develop to smooth-over the deficits caused by its materialistic emphasis?*”

The following is a list of what I call the “**dominant deficits**” that western philosophy developed to cover its flaws. Understanding them is important because our institutions, economy, political structures, and even our churches have emerged from a degraded democracy which advanced, especially in its early years, because of slavery and conquest. Even to this day, we enjoy multiple privileges that are built on the labors and sacrifices of contemporaries who did not receive equal



value or recognition for their contributions to our social and economic fabric.

The first is **Terra nullis**, a western legal term, that means “*land belonging to no one.*” This legal designation was used to justify the acquisition of a territory through conquest and settlement. *Terra nullis* claimed that any indigenous people in the desired territory, even though they lived on the land for hundreds, even thousands of years, still did not “own” the land since they did not meet the “*European standards of ownership.*” As a result, European settlers felt justified in pushing the existing land holders, like the American Indians, off of their land because they did not really “own” it. In later years, because of the pangs of conscience, there were some instances where Indian land was “*purchased,*” but the “*legalese*” in the transactions always favored the buyer and tricked the seller.

The Doctrine of Discovery was another ploy used to take the land away from indigenous people. Westerners ventured-out in search of land and treasure and when they found territories and cultures that they had not seen before, and lusted after, they used “*terra nullis*” to justify imposing themselves on the native populations and the colonization of their land with the simple announcement, “*Look at what we discovered!*”



Skin Color became an issue because Western historical development and records were dominated and written by white people. There were other robust cultures in the world that were developed by people of color, but their histories were not known at the time, or were overlooked by the ego-assumptions of the white culture who, because of their station and sense of accomplishment, considered people of color to be inferior.



The great chain of being is a hierarchical structure that includes all matter and life. The “*Ladder of Being*” was a concept developed by people like Plato and Aristotle in their attempts to understand, explain, and record the details of how the natural world functions.

In medieval Christianity the chain begins with God and descends through angels, humans, animals, plants, and even minerals; the higher the being the more attributes it has and the *closer to God's heart* it is. In this theory, only angels and humans share the spiritual attributes of God because, it was thought, that they alone can love, share a language, experience emotions, have sensations, define their physical needs, and move about with forethought. At the bottom of the chain were minerals because they were unable to move, behold, or reproduce.

Human interaction with the rest of creation was not thought of as stewardship but as domination, a concept that was re-enforced by the translation of Hebrew words that had no comparable English word to convey its meaning. For example, in the KJV of the Bible, in Genesis 1:28, man is to “subdue” the earth and have “dominion” over all of the lesser living things. (See Psalm 8:5-8). Those ideas led us to believe that the earth was made for us alone, and we can use it anyway that we desire. But, my professor in 1977, Frank Seilhammer (1933-2001), provost and former professor of Old Testament at Trinity Seminary, Columbus, pointed out that the Hebrew words “*kanash*” and “*radah*” (subdue and dominion, KJV) in the Genesis passage, have no single English equivalent since the first roughly means “*tender caring*” and the second “*to make things operate in harmony*”. The idea of conquering and lording it over the earth lead us to develop an extractive

economy, the source of our present ecological crisis, rather than a sustainable economy, which was the intent of the scriptures all along.

Human supremacy is based upon the teaching that we are created “*in God’s image*,” the concept, in Genesis, that we are “*stewards*” and that “*all of life is sacred*” were simply not popular notions, although, through the ages, there were some who pondered and even promoted those truths. Today, those concepts are enjoying a revival, brought about by enhanced scientific knowledge of the intelligence and communal relationships of many of the earth’s other creatures, and the more accurate translation and meaning of a number of key biblical concepts and texts. I am not talking about what is recently being called *religious deconstruction*, but the more enlightened translation of the text itself during the last fifty years.



Manifest destiny is the myth that claims that the American Anglo-Saxon race was “*separate and innately superior*,” and “*destined by God to bring good government, commercial prosperity and Christianity to the American continents and the world.*” English/American historian, Reginald Horsman, wrote in 1981, that

“*manifest destiny*” included the view that “*inferior races were doomed to subordinate status or extinction*” and this argument was used to justify “*the enslavement of the blacks and the expulsion and possible extermination of the Indians.*”

The belief behind this claim is that the American people and their institutions are *unique* in history and have special *virtues* that are meant to be spread around the world. The view fails to recognize that the long history of human progress is multi-cultural and multi-faceted. It also fails to understand that the basic concepts leading to the thinking expressed in the *Declaration of Independence* and the *U.S. Constitution* were not new, but are found in other cultures and historical documents. No-one has a corner on the truth and where-ever truth is, God is.

Sheer Nationalism. Nationalism is loyalty and devotion to a nation and the promotion of its culture and interests; it is common throughout the world, but “*Sheer Nationalism*” is so single-minded that it does not take into consideration or modify its opinions, actions, and interests in order to contribute to international justice and good-will.

Sheer Nationalism is expressed in the well-known statement, “*My Country, Right or Wrong.*” This idea, taken somewhat out of historical context, came from a toast by the U.S. Navel hero, Commodore Stevan Decatur: “*Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be right, but our country, right or wrong.*” It is immoral and unethical to ever justify and defend that which is wrong.

Historically, more people have been brutalized and murdered by their own governments than by any other source; more wars have been fought to gain territory and treasure than for any other reason; more civilians have died in wars than soldiers. Sheer Nationalism is an ego-mania that is, wealth motivated, and power dominated.

CONUNDRUM – INTRICATE AND DIFFICULT

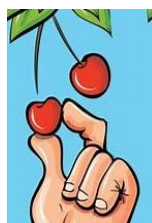
Believers versus non-believers. “*Christianity*” dominated Western Europe. In the theocratic nations of the time; your status was determined by whether you were a “*Christian.*” If you were not a Christian, you were a “*barbarian*” or a “*pagan*” and not fully human and treated accordingly.



Religion and the content and interpretation of religious sacred writings have often promoted more ill-will, inequality, and misunderstanding than many other historical forces. For example, in early Christian history, Michael Servetus, credited with discovering pulmonary circulation, was arrested, tortured, and burned at the stake because his religious ideas did not harmonize with the accepted orthodoxy of the time and because, as a scientist, he participated in the forbidden practice of human body dissection used to learn about physiology. His arrest and execution were ordered by the French theologian and pastor, John Calvin (*Calvinism, which contributed to the development of the Congregational, Reformed, and Presbyterian Churches*). Copernicus and Galileo were persecuted and punished by church leaders, because they taught that, contrary to the Biblical teaching of the day, the sun, not the earth, was at the center of the universe and the world was not flat but round, (See Mark 13:27, Revelation 7:1). Galileo was convicted of heresy, his writings were banned, and he was abused and sentenced to house arrest, where he remained for the rest of his life.

The intellectual and moral conflict between religion, science, and human experience, along with the public hostility it arouses, is with us today in the hotly contested issues of: *birth rights, gender rights, love rights, disease prevention, democracy versus theocracy, and the sources of ecological damage.* In today’s culture-wars, these issues are not explored through discussion, they are argued; sides are chosen, lies are tolerated, defensive strategies enlisted and often financed by wealthy promoters. Many Christians, rather than bringing a calming influence to the descension, have been at the fore-front of the chaos with evangelicals known more for their political affiliation than their Christian virtue. Today, organized religion faces the most distressing loss-of-confidence in American history and the average congregational attendance has declined to 67.

Cherry-picking. Cherry-picking, is the practice of isolating a single example, or sub-topic from a body of work and then using it to support a desired conclusion or argument, often by making careful selections of word choice, emphasis, or tone. In the use of scripture, it is seeking those statements which appear to support our pet ideas. Jeff Myers, PhD, of Summit Ministries, in his new book, “*Truth Changes Everything,*” writes, “*Two out of 10 people at church are there to ask, ‘What does God say and what should I do in response?’ But the other eight are there to say, ‘What do I want to do, and how does the pastor’s sermon affirm my truth?’*” (See 2 Timothy 4:1-5).



The effects of cherry-picking are to suppress real evidence by using incomplete evidence as a means to confirm the particular conclusions that the cherry-picker desires.

Proof-texting, in its *negative* form, is related to cherry-picking because it defiles what God *meant* it to convey into what *we want it to convey* in order to accommodate our own presuppositions, agendas, or biases. In its *positive* form it highlights the points of truth detailed in the scriptures so that they stand-out.



Biblical literalists concentrate on the scriptural text more than they do on its context, with its cultural and historical influences, making negative proof-texting more common. Biblical contextualists, on the other hand, in examining all scripture in its cultural and historical settings, can “*miss the mark*” in their exegesis by underestimating the intent of the teaching.

The history of biblical debating has shown that those who are desperate to advance their ideas and arguments can use the Bible to find support for almost anything; so how do we deal with biblical misuse and abuse? The Old Testament is full of God's *divine wrath* while the New Testament is full of God's *compassion*; both contribute to our understanding of the need for accountability and for forgiveness, but upon what scales do we weigh the application of scriptural teaching?

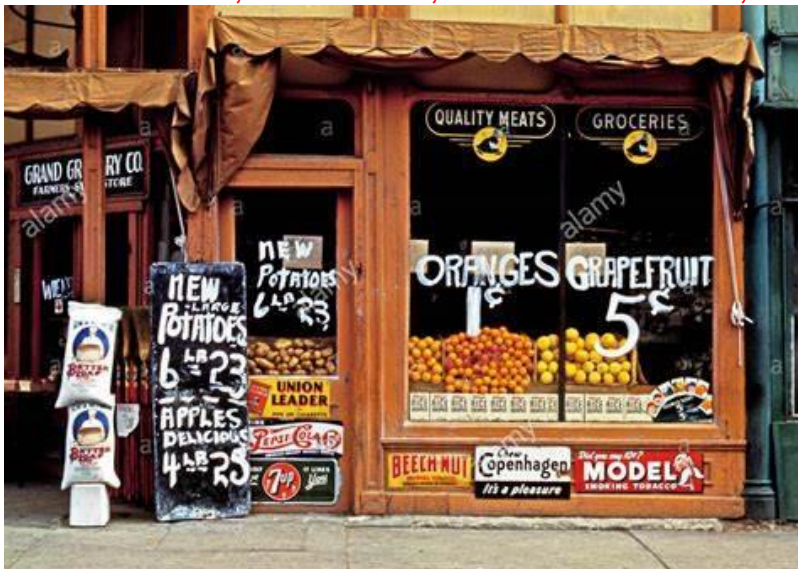
The early Christians believed that the goal of scripture was to reveal God's entrance into history through the life and teachings of Jesus with whom we can have a personal relationship and through whom there is universal salvation. If Jesus is the goal of scripture, then Jesus provides the principles through which all scripture is to be interpreted and by which differences are mediated. This is precisely why we Brethren state that the New Testament is our only creed!

FINIS

We must build a sustainable economy, create a more just society, and Christians must return to a Christocentric faith. This can only be done when we acknowledge the legal, economic, and political favoritism that has allowed some of our citizens to rule over others with the unfair advantages that were given to them by the historical abuse of political and economic power.

In the Old Testament, the *Jubilee Year* (Leviticus 25:9) called for a time of social and economic restoration for the losers, generosity by the

WITH COMMERCIALY GROWN AND PROCESSED FOOD WE HAVE NO CONTROL OVER SOIL CONDITIONS, CHEMICAL USE, PROCESSING ADDITIVES, AND COSTS; AND NO IDEA OF THEIR IMPACT ON OUR HEALTH.



winners, and the renewal of their spiritual ideals by the whole community. We need our own jubilee today to reignite our faith in the democratic form of governance and to improve its equal application for every person.

Much of our population is being manipulated by the **FEAR** of materialistic loss caused by supply-chain issues, inflation/recession, consumer spending, stock-market fluctuations, etc. In a materialistic society, ownership of goods and access to services is seen as the primary source of security and happiness. Promoting public fear of losing that access is often a smoke-screen that is fanned by the rich and powerful in their attempt to protect their economic and political privileges and by the power-seekers who will use any means to gain similar privilege and power for themselves.

Fear can only be overcome by **FAITH** in God's providence. Everything in this world is temporary; even the mountains wear away with wind and water or explode in volcanic eruption. The scripture clearly warns us of the transitory nature of the world's assets and treasures (Matthew 6:19-21) and how lusting after them can misdirect and demoralize us. Fear is controlled or even removed, through trust, and trust comes through faith which is rooted in spirituality, not materialism.

Americans are guaranteed the right to "pursue happiness," but the crucial question is "What is the source of happiness?" Your answer to that question makes all the difference in you and in the world! ☹

This photograph, from the Library of Congress, shows the Grand Grocery Company in Lincoln Nebraska in 1942. Notice the prices and the window display.

I remember, as a small boy, taking my mother's grocery-list to the little narrow grocery-store, tucked between a long row of other buildings, in down-town Naperville, Illinois, a Chicago suburb, handing it to the grocer, and watching as he used his long-handled "grabber" to gather the items from off the high walled shelves behind the counter. A few items were in bushel-baskets, on tables, and low shelves in the narrow middle-space of the store. He would bag them and I would hand him the money that mother had tied in a handkerchief, for payment.

There were only one or two brands of anything to choose from and the variety of canned food was very limited. Store-bought canned items were supplements, because the majority of people grew most of their own food, canned it, or bought it from farmers. In season, there were bushel-baskets full of apples, peaches, pears, and plums from surrounding orchards, from which you could pick what you needed for table-use, or purchase the whole basket-full for home canning.

Big city-dwellers depended upon the farming community on the outskirts of the city, to cart and truck-in fresh vegetables, etc., daily. *Exotic foods*, like bananas, came mostly by rail and, increasingly by a growing trucking industry.

As a boy, one of the sights, that is a joy to remember, were the beautiful, colorful, shelves lined with all kinds of home-canned goodies in the home's pantry or basement. At my boyhood home canning was a family affair where we took turns getting the produce ready, mom and dad filling the jars, tightened the lids, and taking them in and out of the cooker, when they were ready. Home canning is experiencing something of a revival today, because an increasing number of people want to take more control of their diets and get closer to the land.



The great advantage of our modern food system is that distance and season no longer limit our choices allowing for the wide variety of food items on our menu which come by air from across our nation and broad sections of the world in a matter of a few hours.