



CREATION CARE



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

Northern Ohio District, Church of the Brethren, Stewardship Advocate, Clyde C. Fry, cceseven@embarqmail.com

Occasional Newsletter #30, Spring 2019, Providing relevant articles on biblical, economic, political and social impacts and their consequences on God's Creation and the Church. On the Web: nohcob.org, click: Resources, click: Creation Care

Forest Fires



Over the past three-and-one half years two thousand California forest fires have been attributed to the infrastructure of utility companies. The Campfire, in late 2018, stacked up fifty-billion dollars in liability claims against California's Pacific Gas and Electric Corporation which caused it to declare bankruptcy on January 29, 2019. Electric lines touching trees or downed by falling limbs during storms are said to be the main cause. The state does not have the resources to regulate power lines. I have often observed power lines arcing against tree limbs during storms. I had a line/limb fire in my backyard several years ago. Because of my experience with working on power lines, I was able to safely contain it by cutting down the burning limb. Tree-trimming along thousands of miles of electric lines is a formidable task, but it should be on the front burner of every electric utility company in the nation. Sacrificing trees along power lines is necessary in heavily wooded areas, but it also must be done proportionately. ☩

Money! Money! Money!

The "Haves" and the "Have-Nots"



In 2018 the collective wealth of billionaires increased by 12% - that's about one million dollars a day for each of the approximately 2,200 billionaires in the world. In contrast, the collective wealth of the poorest half of humanity was an 11% decline for about 3.8 billion people. Do you get the feeling that the system is rigged? ☩

Thermal Expansion; High Water Right Now!

We know that ocean waters are getting warmer as the planet and its atmosphere warms. We know that as water warms it also expands. We know that many low-lying communities along ocean shores are experiencing regular high-tide flooding. We know that a few small islands have disappeared under ocean waters already and that others are threatened; their leaders are looking for a place to relocate their

island's population. Rising water will create a new kind of refugee as people are forced from their flooded living spaces. What we don't know is how the people living on secure dry-land spaces will react to these "climate change" refugees needing to share that same dry space, and if there is overcrowding, how will we maintain the quality of life for all?

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): "although yearly and regional variability occurs, the overall trend is that, due to sea level rise, the national average frequency of high tide flooding is double what it was 30 years ago. The projected increase in high tide flooding in 2019 [is expected to] be as much as 60% higher across U.S. coastlines as compared to typical flooding about 20 years ago and 100% higher than 30 years ago."

The problem is exacerbated by melting ice at the polar caps. The *National Academy of Sciences* reports, for example, that Antarctica went from losing about 40 gigatons of ice per year in the 1980's to 252



gigatons per year over the last decade, raising global sea levels by 14 millimeters since 1979. (One gigaton is a billion tons. It takes about 10 trillion tons of ice to make oceans rise one inch) ☩

Fresh Water



The famous statues of large human figures on Easter Island, sculpted from volcanic rock, stand as high as 33 feet. They have been a mystery since their discovery by Europeans in 1786. Most of the statues, called "moai," had been toppled or moved away to museums; today, only

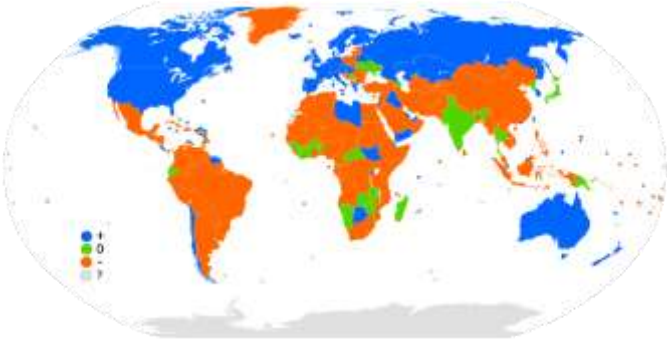
about 50 have been re-erected. The controversy over what they represented and to what purpose they served may have partly been solved. The journal *PLOS ONE*, used a computerized spatial analysis to study the locations of 93 of the statues that were located on the eastern portion of the island and to analyze their relationship with the available resources there. The study discovered that the majority of them were located within sight of springs or streams of drinkable fresh water. The conclusion? The ancient people used the statues as guardians and as offerings of praise for divine provision, to mark the fresh water sites. It seems that wherever humanity settled they felt a sense of the presence of the divine and an appreciation for divine provision. ☩

We Live in the Beginning of the Ongoing

MIGRATION, people moving from one place to another, is the way the earth was populated. From the *cradle(s) of civilization*, from which humanity emerged, people crossed the terrain, over mountains and land-

bridges, oceans and lakes, to settle wherever they were able to maintain themselves. As populations grew and societies organized, every major land-space has now been colonized. Today the world is filled with *nation states* that govern and preside over the people and the land on which they live, for good or ill. There is no end to the migration, for a variety of often complex reasons, ranging from being forced from their home-land to save their lives, to voluntarily seeking greater prosperity somewhere else.

Even though migration has always been a major fact of human existence, today, there are more migrants moving around in the world than at any time since World War II.



Blue denotes positive net migration (into the country), orange denotes negative net migration (out of the country), and green denotes a stable population with no net movement (in or out of the country), grey denotes unknown.

It is estimated today that nearly one in 100 people worldwide are being pushed out of their homes because of political harassment, economic incompetence, war, or climate instability. The picture is even worse when one adds the fact that more civilians have and are being killed today than at any time since WW II. Even more devastating is the fact that the killing is going on with little or no notice by the rest of the world in places like Yemen and Sudan.

MIGRATION should be defined by the reasons that people move away from their places of birth if we are to find a way to create a humane and just policy with which to deal with this divisive issue.



A **REFUGEE** is a person who is forced to flee to another location or nation in order to escape danger or persecution. War, economic collapse, ethnic and racial discrimination or natural disasters and the depletion of natural resources like the availability of water can all play

a part in forcing people to flee for their lives. It should be noted that historically, because of the love of country and the desire to be with their extended family and friends, many refugees want to go back home if and when conditions improve enough to allow their safe return. Their immediate need is for temporary housing and livelihood, but some may need permanent accommodation. Both international and U.S. law makes room for these people to stay, in harmony with their circumstances.

An **IMMIGRANT** is one who chooses to move to another country to improve their livelihoods. They are located in a place that is livable, but they want to move to a location where they see greater potential for prosperity or to join family. They don't have to move to save life and limb; they want to move. Immigrants are admitted into a country subject to issues like employability, health, and quotas. Unfortunately, this term is being misused today to cover anyone who migrates.

An **ILLEGAL ALIEN** is a person who either entered a nation's borders

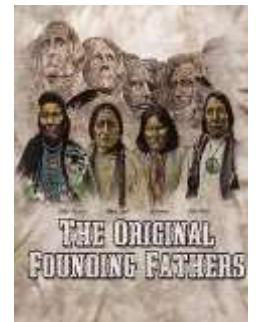
illegally in the first place or entered legally, but has remained in the country beyond the period of time they had permission to stay.

An **UNDOCUMENTED WORKER (UW)** is a person who is not authorized to work in the U.S. because they do not have the proper documentation giving them the right to work here or because they entered our nation illegally in the first place. Undocumented Workers (legal and illegal) have been a part of our economy for generations, often filling jobs that most citizens do not want, like pickers and packers in our agricultural system and service employees in a variety of businesses. They have been a vital part of our workforce since the early days of the founding of our nation. Groups like Legal Aid at Work, formed in 1916 in California, which is funded by local attorneys, and the state Commission on Immigration and Housing try to protect the rights of UW's by offering free legal assistance and advice.

Our **FOREIGN POLICY** must push against dictatorships and push nations to create prosperous societies in which resources are justly distributed. We must stop selling armaments to abusive nations and we should support and accept an active role for the *World Court* to hold nations accountable and to administer justice. I fully realize that these are "*fighting words*" for nationalists, but I must say them, because without accountable and responsible nationalism we are all doomed!

IMMIGRATION HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES IS A MIXED BAG. We are a nation of immigrants. Before we arrived, this land was

populated by the *Indian Nations*, who, even today, have the legal status of sovereign nations within our national borders. Europeans, mainly British, began migrating to North America in the early 1600's. They slowly invaded the land and, through colonization and private ownership, pushed out, to *reservations*, the native populations ("*Indians*" and "*Mexicans*") which had inhabited the land for hundreds of years.



Our *new* country was big on resources and potential and short on labor with the result that in 1619 white Europeans began to import black African people to help fill the labor gap and provide cheap labor, in this case slave labor, which enabled, for example, our Southern agricultural economy to flourish. Abuse of immigrants was also common in the Northeast, among the old money elites, and in the Pacific Northwest where labor and housing disputes led to the passage of the "*Exclusion Act*" that limited Chinese immigration. The 1845, the *Potato Famine* in Ireland sent a barrage of hungry Irish refugees to the U.S. Many received harsh treatment and so they began what we now know as *St. Patrick's Day*. They marched in New York City, for the first time, as an act of solidarity and a protest of their ill-treatment. Finally achieving acceptance, *St. Patrick's Day* has now become an international day of celebration of Irish heritage.

The **NATIVIST** threat has always been with us and today enjoys a revival. Nativist theories have been supported by wealthy partisans, intellectuals, lawmakers, and even several U.S. Presidents. The foremost nativist spokesman in the U.S. was *Madison Grant*. In 1916 he wrote a book called "*The Passing of the Great Race*," in which he spread the doctrine of **white racial purity** all over the world. Using pseudoscience, he argued that the "*Nordic*" race, that had founded America along with "*all of modern society's accomplishments*," were in peril because of the growing non-white population and the dilution caused by interracial marriage. The book was so influential that, in the

1920's the U.S. Congress passed restrictive immigration policies and *Adolf Hitler* wrote to Grant praising his book and calling it his "bible." Eventually, our war with Germany and the Nazis, revealed the ugly inhumanity of nativist policy with the result that Grant's influence was blunted, leaving the majority of our citizens to reject at least some forms of racism.

Today, our troubled society is once again experiencing a revival of interest in nativism and its companions, neo-nationalism and fascism by the adoption of nativist policies and the use of hate-speech.

My **PURPOSE** for writing this lengthy article is that I believe that we stand near the intersection of two forces that present a clear and present danger: **a changing climate that will force migration and the hostile rejection of refugees who flee because of it.**

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION, caused by our changing climate, is expected to produce the greatest natural and social challenge that the world has ever seen. Retired Brigadier General Stephen Cheney, a thirty-year veteran of the Marine Corps, said: "If Europe thinks they have a problem with migration today – wait 20 years. See what happens when climate change drives people out of Africa –the Sahel [sub-Saharan area] especially – and we're talking now not just [about] one or two million, but 10 or 20 [million]. They are not going to south Africa, they are going across the Mediterranean!"

The *New York Times* bestseller book, "*The Uninhabitable Earth, Life After Warming*" by David Wallace Wells, national fellow at the *New America Foundation*, sees unchecked climate warming as a date with Armageddon. Reviewer, Farhad Manjoo, of the *New York Times* writes: "[It] is the most terrifying book I have ever read. Its subject is climate change and its method is scientific, but its mode is Old Testament!"

A majority of military and social planners today believe that **environmental migration** will eventually dislodge millions of people and cause the greatest social unrest in human history, creating massive violence, democratic decline, and economic and social instability unless we use every pertinent tool we have to prepare for and manage it.

It is estimated that the world population will reach 9.8 billion by 2050. 6.7 billion of these are expected to live in urban areas. Futurists are working to redesign urban regions to meet the ecological and human needs necessary to accept this growth, but it can only be accomplished in a society that can maintain civility, protect individual rights, and exercise hospitality. (See *National Geographic* April 2019 issue, page 20: Cities of the Future, From Mega Regions to Micro-Sized Homes)

The bottom line is that the shortage of potable water supplies, sea-level rise with high-tide flooding, flat-land flooding, mega storms, and fires are breaking historical records in many regions, exacting huge human and economic costs. These stressors will continue and will escalate.

What should the **CHURCH** do?

"Do not mistreat foreigners who are living in your land. Treat them as you would a fellow Israelite, and love them as you love yourselves. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19:33-34

My **first** response is that the church should provide the moral, spiritual, and ethical correctives, emanating from the will of God and revealed in the Gospels, needed to redeem a morally bankrupt world that is willing to stratify human beings by political objectives and sacrifice those

who lie outside of those objectives.

The **second** response is that the church should find the paths by which the material, social, and spiritual needs of the overlooked and unfairly treated people in society can be provided for.

"Do not go back through your vineyard to gather the grapes that were missed or to pick up the grapes that have fallen; leave them for poor people and foreigners. I am the Lord your God." -Leviticus 19:10

Beyond this general outline I would suggest these specific points:

1. First, **we must admit to the REALITY that the climate is changing and warming, and that humanity is a major participant in bringing about those changes.** We cannot afford the "Garden of Eden" sin of denial that *Adam and Eve* used in an attempt to cover-up their culpability (*Genesis 3:8-13*). The neglect of our responsibility to be stewards of the earth, as God intended, and our abuse of its resources, must stop. We Brethren once promoted simple living by curbing our consumption and emphasizing modesty in our attire, furnishings, and lifestyle. After more than sixty years of living in a narcissistic culture, we need to take a new look at what it means to live "peacefully, simply, and together." In today's world we need to prayerfully study the scriptures and consider how they can be faithfully applied to the dire situation that we face today, but we will need to change the way we do **Bible Study**, where we fondly restate our established thoughts and opinions in endless discussion year after year, and do **Bible Practice**, where we strategize about how we can apply scriptural teaching to our personal, church, social, political, and economic lives and a daily basis. Only that can put the "GO" back into the Gospel!

2. Second, **we must firmly declare that there is only ONE HUMANITY on earth, created in the image of God and given the breath of life.** (*Genesis 1:26a, 2:7*). "Red and yellow, brown, black, and white, gender, shape, and muscle might" are like thick brush-strokes that give a painting texture, but the purpose and message of the artist's work is found in the design that arises out of his soul. The exterior can never be allowed to devalue what lies on the inside where personhood exists. Our minds are finite and easily corrupted by prejudices; our eyes are blinded by our fear of differences; our emotions are exhausted by our reluctance to fully love and be loved. We must reach deep inside to our souls, for it is the only place where true humanity is encountered. Look beyond the surfaces and see, by God's will, *face-to-face* (*1 Corinthians 13:12*).

A humanity that sees itself as *soul-mates* is the only thing that can successfully negotiate the coming mass migration crisis that will eventually sweep across the globe and avoid the violence that it can create. Christian exceptionalism or political and secular humanism simply cannot stand up to it.

3. Third, we must stop acting like **BIBLICAL lawyers looking to justify our doctrines, opinions, and procedures with proof-texts, and become disciples who humbly stand before God to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly"** (*Micah 6:8*). Only then can we work for the common good and establish human and ecological justice on earth. "Come, let us reason together."

One of the religious arguments being used to justify our harsh treatment of immigrants these days is to say that the O.T. Hebrew specifies a difference in the way we treat a "foreigner" and a "sojourner." A foreigner, it is said, is an illegal person and a sojourner is a legal person; therefore our treatment of this difference is decided, not by the values



set forth in the configuration of human creation¹ itself or by the ideals of the two great commandments² out of which divine and human relations are to be valued and conducted, but by the transient values of a particular nation's social culture, legal system, and economic and political agenda.

¹Each human is created in the image of God and given life with the breath of God -Genesis 1, 2; this thought is also highlighted in passages like Psalm 8:4-6 and Hebrews 2:7, etc.

²Love God with all your being, and your neighbor as yourself -Mark 12:28-31 -the foundation of our relationships to God and each-other.

It is at this point that the neo-nationalists' favorite N.T. passage, Romans 13:1-7, comes into play. In this passage it is alleged that all earthly authority is god-ordained, and therefore, we are obliged to obey it unquestioningly. This passage was used by the complicit church in Germany to justify their support of the Nazis. What is missed in this interpretation is that God-ordained authority is not given *carte-blanc*he. With authority comes responsibility; if you fail in your responsibility, you invalidate the legitimacy of your authority! Failure to honor the intrinsic nature of God's creation, by upholding the common good, makes that authority null and void. Such pseudo authority must be resisted and replaced. We must remember, however, that in the process of resistance to an unjust law, we still remain subject to its enforcement. The personal cost of resistance can be very high depending upon the legal openings provided for change and the means by which one chooses to bring about change.

We must never allow human prejudice to violate the two greatest commandments, that teach us to **love whole heartedly**, with the humanistic idea of *loving conditionally*, because of our political, economic, and social stratifications.



4. Fourth, **SAVING LIVES, both physically and spiritually, is the first priority of the Children of God on Earth and the Disciples of Christ Jesus in the Church.**

All of life is the handiwork of God; life is sacred. The human response and responsibility to **God's gift of life** is to propagate, cultivate, and guard it (Genesis 1:28, 2:15).

One of the great realizations of the 20th century was that all of life is interconnected. The food-chain alone demonstrates this reality as do the changing seasons. Whenever any form of life is threatened, all of life faces some degree of risk. As those risks combine and multiply the threat grows larger and more dangerous as it moves from species to species.

The protection of life is a sacred duty. To save human life is a top priority for followers of Christ Jesus. The familiar phrase, **Jesus Saves**, encompasses one of the great truths of the Gospel even though sin is inevitable in this present age. Inevitable or not, we will still vigorously continue to push against sin because we want to save lives.

This same line of reasoning also applies to world peace. The first great announcement about the birth of Jesus was **"Peace on Earth!"** Human violence in this present age is inevitable, but this does not mean that we should not vigorously push against violence. We push against violence for the same reason that we push against sin; because we want to save lives.

What about **the changing climate** and the dangers it presents for life on earth? What about our problems with **immigration**? In each case we vigorously push for the same reason: to save lives. Now you may

argue that my list does not represent equal values. After all, eternal damnation is different from these "earthly" matters. I will not argue that point, but I will ask: "If these other things don't matter, why did the Creator command us to keep and till the garden and why did Christ Jesus feed the hungry, cure the sick, and comfort the oppressed during his time on earth -- and why are we charged to do the same?" Remember Christ's description of "The Last Judgment" in Matthew 25:31-46? It wasn't the sins of commission or incorrect doctrine that brought the dammed down, it was the sins of omission that involved caring for others in the midst of their physical and spiritual needs! Christians always try to Save – regardless of the odds against it!

5. Fifth, **Christians must JOIN FORCES with other good works.** I believe that the institutional church, as we know it, is being phased-out. Something new is in the process of being born, but in the meantime, our institutional resources are being strained and our impact is diminishing. Today congregations are good at "band-aid" ministries with our grocery bags and material aid kits of various kinds. But we are not good at addressing the conditions which make those grocery bags and aid kits necessary!

The poor fellow who was beaten, robbed, and left to die on the road to Jericho needed a "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) to tend to him (*band-aid ministry*), **but don't forget the roadway!** How many people will be robbed, beaten, and killed before someone does something about the roadway? Good Samaritans and band-aids aren't enough! To make that roadway safe, and serve the common good, requires the population, through which it runs, to provide a *highway patrol* to make and keep it safe. No stop-gap measure will do!

Something as huge as **environmental migration** requires coalitions of "do-gooders" from all walks of life, to come together and find common ground in order to work through the complicated problems and challenges that lie ahead. Some Christians are reluctant to join in broad cooperative work because they are (or feel) thwarted in connecting works of compassion and justice to their theological responsibility. Live it out and spell it out are not twins, they are the two sides of the same coin. When we cannot speak a witness, **be** a witness, but work together when the need is there.

The Mark 9 and Luke 9 story of the disciples forbidding the good works of someone who was not a part of "their group" is worth examining in a broader context. Jesus' statement, "for whoever is not against you is for you" may open doors of cooperation now closed for parochial believers. The **power of presence** is often overlooked in our estimate of what it means to witness. In his 1960's hymn, Peter Scholtes wrote: "They'll know we are Christians by Our Love." When you can't talk, walk the walk – you'll be surprised at what can happen.

It is not often, in human history, that we have been able to forecast, with such accuracy, what is happening to our climate. Exxon's senior scientist, James F. Black, predicted in 1977, with astounding accuracy, how the burning of fossil fuels would affect climate change (See, *Creation Care*, issue 23, page 3). What he predicted is taking place, giving us time to respond and counter-act what is happening. People's lives and livelihoods depend upon our wise and timely response.

Our generation is living at the beginning of something that will be ongoing for a long time. We have the honor, privilege, and responsibility to do something that can make a difference for our children and all the generations that follow. As individuals we may not be able to do "big" things, but we can all do something and we can join others who are also trying to do something. It will all add up to a tidy sum. ☺