



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 #31, Summer 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



MIGRATION, REFUGEES, GUNS AND HOMICIDES

A number of folks talked to me about the migration/refugee article in the last issue asking how U.S. foreign policy is linked to the current refugee dilemma. That is a vast subject. I will simply make two observations.

We have often taken sides in the civil wars of other nations, providing military “advisors,” hardware and weaponry like we did in Cuba in 1961 and in El Salvador in the 1980’s, etc. El Salvador was particularly bad because 85% of the civilian murders were committed by the government that we armed and supported to the tune of between \$1-2 million per day, for several years! Internal violence always produces refugees who flee their country to find safety. For example, *The Inter-American Dialogue* discovered, in 2018, that a 1% rise in homicides in Honduras increased migration there by 120%!

Perhaps the worst link we have to the violence in nations south of our border is the smuggling of guns to the gangs and drug cartels who murder with indiscretion there. According to research, done by the *Los Angeles Times*, more than 212,000 illegal firearms from the U.S. find their way into Mexico each year, and that’s just one nation. The *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms* reported that 70% of the guns seized in Mexico each year were originally sold in the U.S. –most of them in Texas, California, and Arizona. A *University of San Diego study* in 2013 revealed that nearly half of American gun dealers rely on those sales in order to stay afloat. In some of the nation’s south of us gangs of thieves regularly rob commuters and small businessmen, often killing or injuring some of them in the process. Contrary to the claims of our political pundits, **violence and poverty are the leading causes of migration.** The *Monitor Weekly* (7-29-19, p13) reports that 800,000+ refugee asylum cases have been filed in federal court. At the present rate by which cases are expedited, it is likely that applicants won’t get hearings for years.

Our refugee problems will not disappear until we address the reasons that people flee, like stopping the flow of guns to gangs and by imposing economic sanctions upon those nations who mismanage their economies and abuse their populations. ☩

THIS YEAR FARMERS ARE BEAT BY WATER AND HEAT

Shrug it off at your own risk, but the reality is that air and water temperatures are steadily rising and breaking records across the globe. According to NASA, the five hottest years in recorded

history have been in the last five years and 18 of the 19 warmest years on record have occurred since 2001. Warm water evaporates faster and dumps back down out of the clouds with increased frequency and volume causing flooding, erosion, and soil oversaturation.

The *U.S. Department of Agriculture*, predicts that nationwide, farmers will harvest the smallest corn crop in four years in 2019. For the first time, scores of local *Farmers-Markets* have been forced to close because of a lack of produce.

Excessive wetness this spring kept farmers out of their fields and record-breaking heat waves in several regions threaten the few crops that they were able to plant. *Volumetric Water Content (VWC)*, is a term used to describe the amount of water being held by the soil by comparing inches of water to inches of soil. When water enters the soil faster than it can drain downwards with gravity, crops will drown, and when the water and soil is warm it lacks the oxygen plant roots need to produce growth.

Livestock farmers were short on hay because of unfavorable weather last year and the wet fields this year are only making it worse. Hay is in short supply and costly.

Add the effects of inclement weather with the Administration’s imposition of tariffs and the trade-war with China that it ignited, along with China’s efforts to find permanent new sources for soybeans including nations like Brazil, and you can understand why farmers are nervous about the governments agricultural policy (or should I say interference?). Free-markets and tariffs don’t mix, nor does the use of tariffs as a club assist in honest face-to-face international negotiations.

With a major election in the wings in 2020, Congress and the Administration have attempted to fill the economic gap, created by the trade-war, with government funding. Last year the farm-aid package was \$12 billion and this year \$16 billion of which \$14.5 billion is for direct payments to farmers, another \$1.4 billion in government purchases of agricultural commodities that will be distributed to food banks, and \$100 million in loose change to ‘promote’ exports to new countries. I find it interesting that this farm aid (which I favor, in light of the depressing circumstances) comes at a time when talk of “Socialism” has become a topic of political debate.

The farm economy is of huge importance to all of us and should be more carefully considered than it has been recently. Farmer income has traditionally been on the short end of the money chain and it is dominated more and more by corporate farming. The good news, according to *Monitor Weekly* (July 29, 2019 issue,

page 22), is that many young people are attempting to return to the farms on the Great Plains “*bringing a new dynamism to rural America.*” ⊕

THE GOVERNMENT GIVETH AND TAKETH AWAY



According to the non-political government watch-dog, *U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, we will have a one-trillion-dollar deficit in 2019. Increased military spending and reduced income caused by targeted tax cuts are the major contributors. The usual voices opposed to government involvement in social services are pushing to cut social “*discretionary*” spending. One example of how some plan to reduce budget spending is the proposed change of rules for the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*, formerly known as food stamps. It is projected that the change will cut about 3 million people from continuing to receive benefits “*saving*” about \$2.5 billion a year. The average monthly SNAP benefit currently stands as \$134.85 for an individual, which works out to about \$4.50 per day or \$1.50 per meal, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. *The fraud rate is only 0.57. (Try matching that to the Pentagon’s fraud of 6.5 trillion!)*

Think that you will never need food stamps? In our rapidly changing work environment with the super-growth of robots and artificial intelligence in the work-place, think again. ⊕



MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

An Editorial

The kind and quality of our caring depends upon the values and beliefs that we hold. Although Christian values had some influence in the founding of our nation, it is naive for anyone to think that our nation and its various mechanisms function solely within those parameters. In reality most of what we do lies far afield from the principles laid out by the founder of Christianity, Jesus, the Christ. The contrast is easily seen, but little recognized, in our economic and political systems. The secular philosophical architects with the greatest influence on those systems are little known by system outsiders, especially in the church where the economics of capitalism and the processes of democracy are often mistakenly seen as an outgrowth of Christian values.



Twice, I have written about the impact that one of those secular theologians, *Milton Friedman (1912-2006)*, had on the values and conduct of modern business. (CC # 23, p3 & #29, p 2). The leader of the Chicago School of Economics at the University of Chicago and winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize in Economics, Friedman taught that **the sole purpose of a firm is to make**

money for its shareholders. He believed that business executives who pursued a goal other than making money were “**unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades.**”

That statement arises out of a secular philosophy that is foreign to the values of community and mutuality so basic to Christian discipleship. It is my contention that what is taking place in Washington DC and on Wall Street, these days comes from the secular “*Gospel according to American Capitalism*” and lies outside of, and sometimes in direct opposition to, the values of Jesus. I do not rant against capitalism; it has both built and busted millions of people through the years. I contend that its weaknesses must be acknowledged and repaired or replaced with something more equitable and dependable.

It is obvious that business must make a profit in order for it to exist. The argument is not about profit. The argument is about the difference between an individual **earning money** commensurate with their physical and intellectual labor and **making money** through economic and political schemes that manipulate the distribution of wealth. The argument is also about proportionality and accountability. *Consumer Capitalism* is rapidly draining the earth’s resources, filling the land and the seas with junk, poisoning the air, driving countless species into extinction, and turning humanity backward to divisive tribalism. All of this is done with the aid of civil religion and secular humanism through which we participate in ecological murder that will eventually lead to our own demise. We are meant to do better. We can do better. We must do better.



The reality is that we live in a delicate dance between individual rights, responsibilities, and the common good. In the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson declared that “*life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*” are fundamental rights established by the Creator; as a part of *natural law*.

In the Constitution we have come together in an *ongoing effort* to “*form a more perfect union*” which is established to protect and promote human rights through a community that is preserved by a set of common values that are enabled through just laws and self-imposed order. It is delicate because it requires a public with keen self-awareness and a clear understanding of its values and goals. Bad national leadership is a serious problem today, but it is a carless and distracted public that will destroy our society by its ignorance and inattention. To talk of going back in time to reestablish a *Camelot* is nostalgic foolishness. There was never a time when things were good enough, certainly not for the majority. Our focus is to be critically self-aware in the present in order to make strategic plans for the future with the goal of continuing to form a *more perfect union*.

Key to this discussion is the question of human worth and destiny.

Christians generally believe that a person’s value comes from the fact that each of us is created in the image of God, is called to a life of Godly obedience and mutual service, with an eternal destiny in God’s presence. (Genesis 1:26-28, Philippians 2:1-11, John 3:16). Our conviction is that “*God didn’t make no junk,*” because everything in creation is tied to, and necessary for, the success of the whole.

Secularism generally believes that our earthly life **is all that there is** and so we must maximize our individual “*pursuit of happiness*” as the highest moral good and the survival of the fittest is the governing rule. “*Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die!*”



The chief modern proponent of this view is the novelist/storyteller/philosopher, **Ayn Rand** (1905-1982). She has been widely read and has many devotees among our economic and political leaders today. I contend that the values and processes of our business and government today have evolved from the influence of Randism. Rand wrote volumes urging people to be **selfish**. In her view this meant that we should: “1) Follow reason, not whims or faith; 2) Work hard to achieve a life of purpose and productiveness; 3) Earn genuine self-esteem; 4) Pursue your own happiness as your highest moral aim; 5) Prosper by treating others as individuals, trading value for value.” (Rand Website) Rand wrote: “There’s nothing of any importance in life---except how well you do your work. Nothing. Only that. Whatever else you do will come from that. **It’s the only measure of human value.** All the codes of ethics they’ll try to ram down your throat are just so much paper money put out by swindlers to fleece people.” (Rubin: “Ayn Rand’s Literature of Capitalism”).



I first came across Rand in the 1949 film, based on her novel by the same name, “*Fountainhead*,” starring Gary Cooper. The screenplay, also written by Rand, is about a young individualist architect who believes that the rights of personal

will, honesty, and ambition should be protected at all costs because the products of his talents are his property and cannot be copied or modified by, what he called, predatory looters. When, during the construction of his unique and innovative building, he finds evidence that his rights have been violated, he responds by destroying the building with dynamite. As a result, he stands trial, during which he expounds upon the rights of the individual. *Objectivism*, in which *individualism* stars, is the Randian philosophical foundation for the story.

One of the strange things about those who worship at the altar of individualism and productivity is that it creates a cast system measured by quantity more than quality. One’s stature grows or shrinks by the amount you produce and the return that it garners. Drop below a certain level, regardless of cause, and you become a kind of dependent human trash because you have no intrinsic value outside of your ability to produce.

Rand was born, Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum. She was a young 12-year-old Russian Jewish girl who, during the Russian Civil war of 1917, witnessed Red Army soldiers force her father, a very successful pharmacist, to surrender his business to the Communists, in the “*name of the people*.” Her resentment and hatred of that injustice and its justification, ate away at her psych for the rest of her life. They had no right to steal what her father had so painstakingly built and she committed herself into showing why that was true.

Because of the communist take-over, women were allowed to enroll in universities for the first time. Rand took advantage of this new liberty and became one of the first women to enroll at

Petrograd State University where she began her studies in the department of social pedagogy, majoring in history. Her study of the works of people like Friedrich Nietzsche, deeply impressed her. Rand was no ordinary student and was able to read French, Russian, and German. She also studied Screen Arts in Leningrad where she had her first essay published.

Alisa, took the name Ayn Rand, sometime in the early 1920’s and eventually moved to the U.S.A. where she became a naturalized citizen, worked at various jobs, including one with the famous director, Cecil B. DeMille, and eventually became a noted novelist and philosopher.

Rand was a radical atheist who supported a “*value for value*” kind of generosity among equals, but vehemently opposed any notion of servant-leadership or providing “*entitlements*” for those who were unable, for whatever reason, to make the capitalistic system work for them. She wrote: “*The man who attempts to live for others is a dependent. He is a parasite in motive and makes parasites of those he serves. The relationship produces nothing but mutual corruption --- he degrades the dignity of man, and he degrades the conception of love. But that is the essence of altruism.*”

Rand wrote: “*To say ‘I love you’ one must first know how to say the ‘I.’ The meaning of the ‘I’ is an independent, self-sufficient entity that does not exist for the sake of any other person. A person who exists only for the sake of his loved one is not an independent entity, but a spiritual parasite. The love of a parasite is worth nothing.*” Self-fulfilling erotic love played a major role in her writings and in her life.

Rand’s idea of self-love was anchored in individualism and not in relationships. In Rand the value is found in the happenstance of being one of the human species which exists within the limits of biology and an earthly lifetime. Know your makeup, know what you want, and work hard to get it the best way you can; do it quickly, because a lifetime is very short.

An interesting contrast to the Rand idea of self-knowledge and self-respect is found in Galatians 5:14, “*Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*” In Christ we have contagious self-assurance that embraces and encourages everyone we touch. In contrast, Christians, know that they are creatures of the Creator who are made from love for love. Together we build an interdependent caring community of equals who find self-fulfillment in the nature of our *being*, regardless of our *doing*. Read James 2:14-26.

Rand was an avid supporter of capitalism and many believe that she provides the best moral rationale for its existence.

Rand taught that altruism is a “*weapon of exploitation*” and that religion falsely teaches that dependence is a virtue. She firmly believed that self-reliance and self-realization comes as the result of one’s ability to produce.

In her philosophy of *Objectivism*, *individualism* is king and any kind of *collectivism*, whether it comes by force, as in communism, or by vote, as in socialism, is treason. Big government is always bad because, it takes and usurps power, but produces nothing; because of its ability to impose restrictions, and its inclination to “*rob the rich to give to the poor.*” Big business is good because it is the creature of the geniuses of production. Big military is good, because it is needed to protect our money and property from the envious, grasping needy.



Rand's current supporters are numerous. Australian-born American "media with a message" mogul, Rupert Murdoch, in *Free Market is a Fair Market* (4-5-13), believed that the government was out to steal from him. He wrote: "What's fair about taking money from people who earned it and giving it to people who didn't?" Paul Ryan, former Speaker of the House, said that Rand's novels were "the reason I got involved in public service" and required some of his staff to read them. His proposed "Path to Prosperity" budget, as a starting point, called for ending the entitlements involved in Medicare. Randites believe that social programs and the idea of "entitlements" creates laziness and imposes a drag on all productive people; government taxes are theft; social security, food stamps, universal health care, and the like, are socialism. Interestingly, many Randites do not see government subsidies or outright bail-outs of weak or failing businesses, as socialism. There appears to be exceptions to the doctrine of the *survival of the fittest*, at least for troubled businesses. (Consider Ohio's recent action (7-23-19) to "protect jobs" with the bailout of 2 failing coal fired and 2 failing nuclear powered plants. Sounds like back-door socialism to me.)



I was a delegate to a state health conference held in Columbus, OH, during the Reagan (another Randite) era. I heard the federal health official, who was leading the conference, say, *as in everything else, we must get used to the idea that if you can't afford something, (like health care), you must go without it regardless of the consequences.* Hard? I thought so, but many in the room did not.

The list of current Rand devotees in politics is like a *Who's/Who* that runs from the White House through the Senate and into the Supreme Court. Her novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, (which is a story about how government regulations finally stifled business to the point that it forced societies' innovative thinkers and produces to slowly disappear to a sheltered hidden valley in Colorado in order to recreate the 19th century world: i.e. -Make America Great Again). *Atlas Shrugged* is said to be second, only to the Bible, in the number of copies sold.

At the heart of our economic and political struggle today is the contrast between those who march to the beat of the philosophical principles of the "God-believers" and those of **American Capitalism**, as seen through the eyes of the Randites. The key questions are: "Does the value of a person transcend their humanity? Is human destiny linked to more than the limitations of an earthy biological existence? In religious terms: 'Are we our brother's keeper?'"

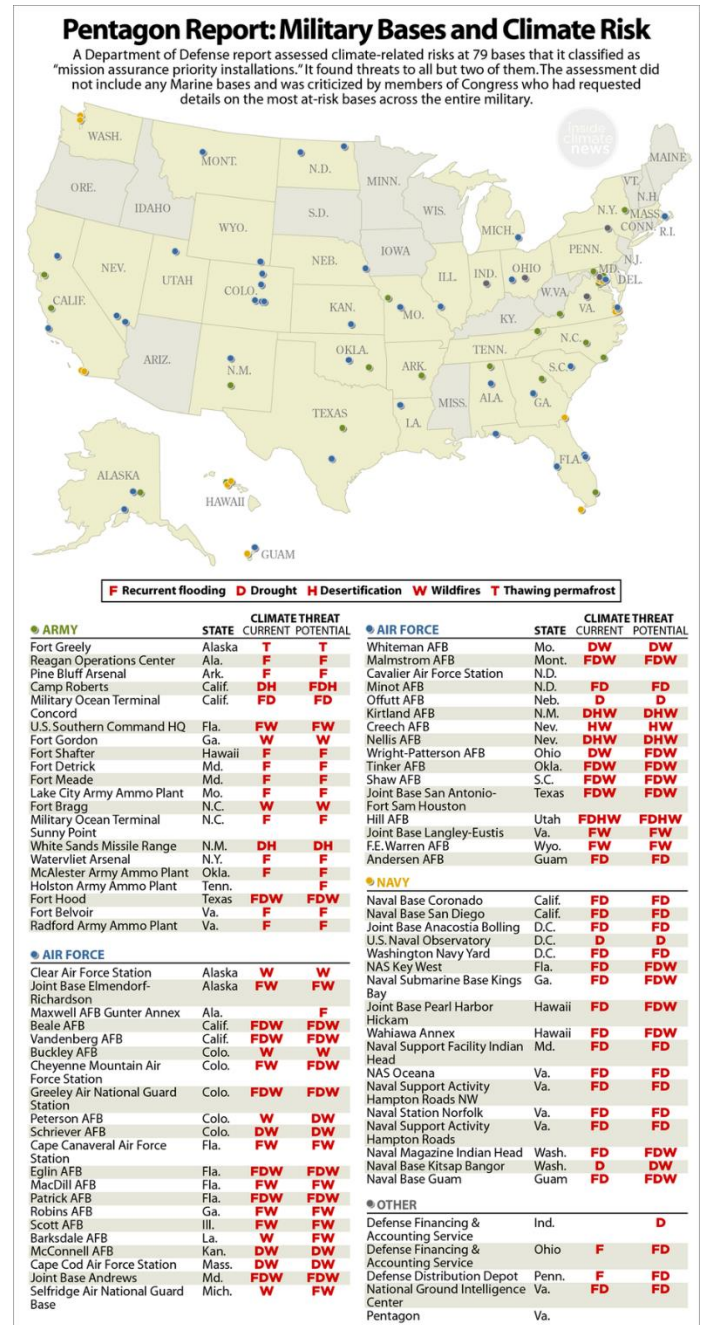
The sense of value for each individual among the "God-believers" is found in their ties to and dependence upon each-other and upon the sacred, through whom they are empowered beyond themselves and whose destinies are not limited by time and space. In the Randism of "American Capitalism," the value of each individual is found in their independence from each other and their ability to produce, by marshaling their energies to use people and earthly resources for personal gratification within the limitations of time and space.

The bottom line is that Randian values trump Christian values in today's political and business world. That is why the polls show that the discrepancy between public opinion and government

action is so out-of-sync. We are not created equal in ability or strength. As the *Children of God*, the strong make allowances for the weak. Business exists to provide product and livelihood, for stockholders, employees, and the public, through a just social contract. In my view, Randism changes the concept of "For the People and by the People" to "For the Producers and by the Producers." That is not democracy, it is selfish plutocracy.

Followers of Christ and believers in democracy, should take notice and act accordingly, because, as we sing praises in the valley, the floods of social and religious destruction are gathering in the mountains. ⊕

THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TAKES CLIMATE CHANGE VERY SERIOUSLY



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense. PAUL HORN / InsideClimate News

Heatstroke has increased 60% since 2008 in the armed forces even with a smaller deployment. The Marines top the list followed by the Army, Navy, and Airforce. ⊕