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Merry Christmas is not just Personal Peace and Affluence

Today, when we wish you a Merry Christmas the general underlying meanings from the culture are essentially, “We wish you in this season and throughout the year personal peace and affluence.”

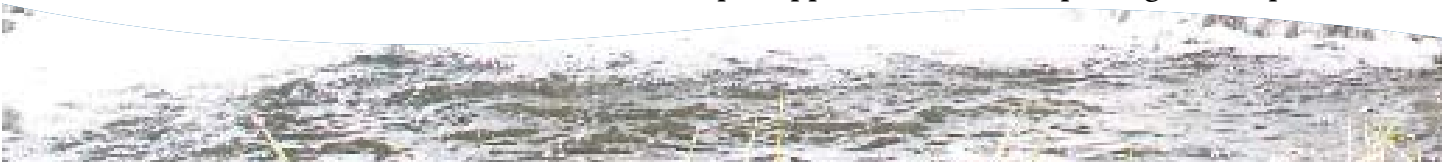
Not all that well known in the world and in the church is the concept of a worldview of only “personal peace and affluence” was a construct of the late Francis Schaeffer, probably the best, well known Christian theologian and apologist of the last half of the 20th century. Schaeffer was the founder of L’Abri, a Christian community in Switzerland.

It was Schaeffer’s contention that the prime worldview operating in the world in his life was based upon those presuppositions of personal peace and personal affluence. If you look at our current economic stupendous changes, what you see is that these two presuppositions

are no longer working as well as they once did.

Therefore, the world economic crisis has at its core a philosophical malady, which has shown symptoms related to housing, energy, and finance. We may concoct all sorts of remedies or prescriptions to treat what we believe is wrong, but true economic health cannot be restored without making alterations to the worldview that personal peace and affluence is not just the highest calling of mankind, but really is an unworkable or lasting way to run a culture or human civilization.

Personal peace and affluence were indeed the operational paradigms of culture in Schaeffer’s era of the late 70s and 80s, Now, another couple of decades down that highway means, contrary to what you might be hearing spun by those who owe their entire position to these paradigms, the problems



are going to continue into the future until they are replaced, by both more pragmatic, and philosophically different ways of looking at the functions of human society.

If those new paradigms continue to be only individually and materially oriented, it is going to be a very dark time for human culture for a very long time.

In the more recent history, especially these fallouts and bailouts, American economic policies have been based upon a pretty orthodox adherence to Keynesian principles. In the concluding Bush Administration the application has proceeded from an unrestricted laissez faire, enterprise principle. That obviously has allowed for economic growth based upon those who have direct access to laissez faire leveraged capital, essentially bigger is better, but government was behind it all, encouraging and promoting personal peace through affluence. No other worldview need apply.

As the Obama Administration is shaping up economically, the same players seem to be still in control; only this time government intervention is going to take place in a more open way. The still unveiled trillion dollar stimulus package is, or will be designed, "to get the economy based solely on personal peace and affluence going again."

Similar economic stimulus packages are now in formation throughout the world economies, including China, which is now the biggest investor in American debt. Debt is the stimulating commodity in all of this, because there is no sufficient net asset value in any of the developed world to fund these policies. For developing economies, well lot's of luck dudes, it is going to be an economic winter, for a very long time.

Keynesian economics, when you look at its true essence, is basically focused on consumer spending to buy stuff. Government has the role to create that demand, by whatever monetary means at their disposal. Underlying it all is a worldview of materialism is all there is, and other aspects of human personalities, don't exist or are irrelevant. The highest and only goal of human civilization is essentially personal peace through

personal affluence alone. That is not quite the God that created the universe, nor even the god of scientific natural selection.

What is interesting in more than just an academic sense, that may come down to truly a daily application, is that one way or the other, economic theories and the applications thereof are substantially based upon what happened during the Great Depression. So now what is occurring in this early stage of the world's financial crisis is basically, "We think this was not properly executed during the Great Depression, so we are going to try this now. This shoulda, coulda, hopefully will work, is not the investment atmosphere to take risks if you are lumped into membership of the personal peace and affluence fellowship.

The real fear of economists now is no longer inflation, but deflation. Since the Great Depression all countries have had some experience in dealing with inflation, some successful, some not so good. Deflation, except perhaps Japan in the 1990s is not that well known, and much of that, by many is associated with high taxes, to support massive infrastructure spending. Oh, well!

Of course we are told that steeply falling home prices, is not deflation, but a market correction based upon cheap mortgages and subprime loans to unqualified buyers. Have faith; this will all turn around soon, taxpayers can purchase banks, auto companies, and the list continues to grow. It sort of makes the soon enhanced infrastructure of the Brooklyn Bridge look like a great deal!

Schaeffer is interesting from the church perspective also, as reported in Duin's book, Schaeffer was one of the early, well educated, ordained, Christians that quit the formal church. L'Abri was really an intellectual evangelical Christian community, that continues until this day. In some sense Schaeffer was a prophet of the actuality of what the church and the world is now facing in current reality.

Over the last couple of months, I became involved in public meetings relating to developing a new forest management plan for the Colville National Forest. Specifically these meetings dealt with creation of legal Wilderness Areas within the forest utilizing what now are described as roadless areas.

The interesting thing about these meetings was that all the formal professional and recreational communities or organizations across the spectrum pretty much agreed generally on the fact that most of the parcels recommended for wilderness should receive wilderness designations. The real problems came from individuals at either extreme, some of which were elected politicians, who were unable or unwilling to entertain some reasonable position. These positions could be summarized, "Any position other than my position interrupts my applications of personal peace and affluence as it applies to me, and hence any other worldview, is unacceptable and wrong."

The Holidays as now promoted are focused upon only personal peace and affluence. One of the prime functions is to have it all with no pain and really no commitment except perhaps to maintaining your credit score.

Christmas as it existed when I was a child, was an expectation of something I had truthfully coveted for a long time. My mother, raised as the oldest child in a Great Depression family, generally replaced my material coveted thing, with an excess of related things, none of which I really wanted or desired. I did not understand that focus at the time and still don't, but when questioned she always used the example of a Depression Christmas when her only Christmas present was an orange, so she wanted her son to have lots of presents, even if they were just stuff somewhat related to my greatly desired and coveted treasure.

Underlying it all however, the reason for Christmas was the birth of Jesus, the Christ child, born in a manger in Bethlehem, according to the prophecies in the Old Testament. Sometime in my elementary school days, I think a Spokane paper offered half sized color cutouts of the Nativity scene, which could be glued to pieces of plywood, and then placed in a home built rustic barn wood stable. So for a long period a Christmas tradition was to "put up the house for baby Jesus."

The trouble with personal peace and affluence is that it really doesn't relate to reality, in the sense of the nature of we humans as

a creation, "in the image of God." In that light, anything that upsets our personal situation, is going to cause stress and bring into question, the validity of not only our personal personal peace, but subconsciously question the truth of affluence also.

The Christian worldview, which relies solely on the grace of God alone, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a baby born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, his sinless life, death as a propitiatory sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, his bodily resurrection from the dead, means that total Godly sacrifice is the source of the only true peace in this world and in the world to come. That true peace is an external transcendent absolute truth reality.

After my heart surgery early in 2003, I gained a new perspective on life. During the Christmas season I wrote extensively about these insights late that year and early in 2004. The theme of those writings, especially "The Festival of Immanuel" focused on the principle of redemption of common and pagan things and events as Jesus, the Light of the world, redeemed all our pagan practices.

Personal peace and affluence is a pagan practice. It is sort of amazing in the fallout from the bailouts, there is developing a unity in diversity about why all the fixes proposed did not and are not working to save our personal peace and affluence. Whether you are a liberal or a conservative, or somewhere in the middle, we see a strong consensus that this these are not working and for this these are specific reasons. Those specific this these reasons center basically upon well positioned individuals taking advantage of the system to promote their personal peace and affluence at the expense of all the folks. The common communities of folks are beginning to get over their differences for the sake of a common good to solve a very difficult problem. This is quite similar to the community consensus in the wilderness illustration above.

All the best minds of mankind are not going to save the fallacious worldview of personal peace and affluence from it's coming demise. Similarly by the time we get around to saving the world from global warming, it will become evident that we really don't have the wherewithal to do that either, especially when global cooling is a much more serious problem.

The only hope of mankind is redemption from our own folly. Until we recognize the reality of human folly, the fall of folly will only get worse. As I reflect on this year, it is truly of gift of God's grace, which so many of us now beginning to realize that human folly exists. The last significant worldwide human folly was the Great Depression, which in many ways led to World War II, the greatest tragedy in all of human history.

So wherever you are in the world this holiday season, in anyway you may celebrate your traditions, spend some time looking at this current world in the humorous reality of human folly. I realize that this is serious, but only deadly serious to those who do not recognize that two eternal principles govern all of creation; those principles are law and grace. Whenever the justice of the law is present, in some way grace arises, to redeem that which was lost. That reality is not perfect today, but some day, that eternal absolute reality will enter our fallen world in a way we can understand, as opposed to the current redemptive understanding which rest upon faith in transcendent reality from God alone.

That redemption is present in the Christmas season that alone redeems the natural and specific laws of darkness and the absence of light, both natural and philosophically.