



Views on High from an Angular Unconformist

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June 2017, with latest updates in January 24, 2022

Insights Sparked by an Angular Unconformity

An enlightening and revealing diatribe began materializing in my mind when I witnessed an "angular unconformity" in Box Canyon above Ouray, Colorado, a place locally known as "the Switzerland of America". There, many layers of billion-year-old black slate rock can be seen that have been uplifted from the horizontal strata of their formation until they are now nearly vertical, and on top of this rock formation are countless perpendicular layers of sandstone that were deposited over subsequent eons. At the time, a thought inexplicably occurred to me: "Since keeping people relatively safe is surely one of the most important responsibilities of any government, national safety should be sought for the maximum number of people over the longest duration of time, and not merely a false prosperity of the wealthiest and most influential few at the expense of everyone else."

Greater measures of social justice and less extreme disparities of wealth and privilege are much more desirable for society as a whole than excessively inequitable extremes like those that characterize affairs in countries around the world today. It is simply too costly to let rich people rig economic systems to gain ever-bigger monopolies on a nation's wealth, mainly because they monopolize wealth rather than investing it in the greater social good, and they are eager to incarcerate those who object or violate rigged laws, or who protest and defy corrupted institutions.

As the 21st century unfolds, crucial issues confront Americans -- and people everywhere. It is surely becoming increasingly important for us to deal intelligently, fairly and effectively with these challenges, and to give top priority to these issues of public morality, and to not ignore them or deny their existence or expend huge amounts of effort to distract attention from the problems and cut public funding from efforts to solve them.

In Professor Robert Reich's book, *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few*, the insightful professor writes that he wants his book "to serve as a blueprint for how we as progressives can expose the false 'truths' about the economy being peddled to the public by Wall Street and corrupt politicians who are invested in the status quo." The fact is that the wealthiest Americans have created a culture in which the "free market" -- an economy that primarily benefits the highly privileged at everyone else's expense -- cannot be questioned.

As the USA today becomes a nation of historically extreme inequality, we should heed what has been known since the times of our Founders, when wise leaders cautioned that entrenched economic inequality leads to inequities in political representation because rich people use their money and abuse their influence to defend and expand their narrowly beneficial privileges.

According to Carl Sagan in *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, "Thomas Jefferson believed that the habit of skepticism is an essential prerequisite for responsible citizenship. He argued that the cost of education is trivial compared to the cost of ignorance, of leaving government to the wolves. He taught that the country is safe only when the people rule." Let's strengthen our democracy by giving people more power!

"Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example."

--- Mark Twain

We know that really rich people and big corporations dominate the political process to an excessive degree, making our system a plutocracy and an oligarchy -- rule by the wealthy few. Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page of Princeton did a study in 2014 that concluded that elites got their way not just often, but virtually all the time. "When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the US political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it."

Similarly, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren has stated that the American people understand that the rules are rigged, and the game is fixed to favor the few. A strong progressive populist movement is needed to clean out Washington D.C. and make the government an instrument of the common good, rather than a tool of narrowly focused corporations and private interests. And legislation should be enacted to curtail the unlimited amounts of money being spent by rich people to influence elections and policy making, and to defend free speech for individual Americans against the mercilessly loud bullhorn being wielded by moneyed interests.

The far right populist movement that allowed Donald Trump to grab power is a far cry from a progressive movement, and it miserably failed under Trump to reform government in ways consistent with the common good. Professor Larry Diamond once weighed in on this issue. The most important thing we could do to improve the prospects of democracy in the world "is to fix our democracy at home," says Diamond, a democracy specialist who was once named "Teacher of the Year" by the Associated Students of Stanford University. Professor Diamond's perspectives were judged to admirably transcend political and ideological barriers, and he was honored for his "passion for democratization, peaceful transitions, and the idea that each of us can contribute to making the world a better place." Hallelujah for that passion!

Most Americans want us to break out of the political morass in which our nation currently finds itself, and want extreme levels of inequality to be redressed, and fairness goals of democratic institutions to be revitalized.

The conservative hold on our politics has reached a calamitous extent today, even with an arguably growing center-left majority in the country. Inequality in income and wealth has reached record levels, but Republicans in Congress reject even "low-hanging fruit" like the repeal of the obscene "carried interest" provision that allows hedge fund multi-millionaires to pay low taxes on their huge earnings. Republicans are, for narrowly selfish purposes, staunchly opposed to enacting sensible limitations on offshore tax havens for giant global corporations. Bipartisan efforts to finance the rebuilding of our often increasingly decrepit infrastructure have had great difficulty getting passed, even when supported by the Chamber of Commerce and big unions like the AFL-CIO. Twenty-five states scorned the offer by the federal government to pay for expanding Medicaid for low-wage workers during President Obama's tenure in office, even though the cost to the states would have been very low. Conservative ideology, it seems, generally trumps fairness in states run by Republican politicians.

Ironically, according to Eric Posner in *The Demagogue's Playbook*, the original populists in the United States were farmers who created the "People's Party" to counter the indifference of the Republicans and Democrats, "who when not refighting the Civil War were preoccupied with business and urban issues -- or 'power ad plunder,' as the populists argued."

"Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company."

--- Mark Twain

The next two paragraphs are made previously in *Climate Change Considerations*, but are repeated to introduce the content that follows them.

Robert Reich wrote an incisive article in September 2015 about how an economy depends fundamentally on public morality -- "shared standards about what sorts of activities are impermissible because they so fundamentally violate trust that they threaten to undermine the social fabric." Curiously, many Republican presidential candidates and state legislators at the time were furiously focusing on private morality -- on contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage, what people do in the privacy of their bedrooms, and legislation concerning voting rights and basic rights for women and gay people and minorities -- while at the same time our country was experiencing a far more significant crisis in public morality.

One aspect of today's crisis in public morality is that CEOs of large corporations now earn more than 300 times the average wages of all workers, and insider trading is endemic on Wall Street, where hedge-fund and private-equity moguls are taking home hundreds of millions of dollars each year. A few extraordinarily wealthy people are investing huge and unprecedented sums in currying favor with scheming politicians, seeking to rig the economy for their own selfish benefit even more than it's already rigged. Meanwhile, the average wages of working people continue to languish as jobs are off-shored or off-loaded onto "independent contractors."

"A blight has fallen upon us. And the monarchy of the rich and the powerful are the author of it. I had not expected the monarchy to come so soon, but it is here, and it is sitting on the throne."

--- Mark Twain

The sadly exaggerated level of inequality in the world today is one of Robert Reich's main issues of interest. One wonders whether it is possible in the current corrupted American political system for democracy to tame plutocracy. As the great Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis sensationally warned, "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Let's all be stronger supporters of democracy and greater equality!

Hear these observations from Robert Reich:

"All this is in sharp contrast to the first three decades after World War II. Then, the typical CEO earned no more than 40 times what the typical worker earned, and Wall Street was boring. Then, the wealthy didn't try to control elections. And in that era, the wages of most Americans rose. Profitable firms didn't lay off their workers. They didn't replace full-time employees with independent contractors, or bust unions. They gave their workers a significant share of the gains. Consumers, workers, and the community were considered stakeholders of almost equal entitlement.

We invested in education and highways and social services. We financed all of this with our taxes.

The marginal income tax on the highest income earners never fell below 70 percent. Even the effective rate, after all deductions and tax credits, was still well above 50%.

We had a shared sense of public morality because we knew we were all in it together. We had been through a Great Depression and a terrible war, and we understood our interdependence.

But over time, we forgot. The change began when Wall Street convinced the Reagan administration and subsequent administrations to repeal regulations put in place after the crash of 1929 to prevent a repeat of the excesses that had led to the Great Depression. This, in turn, moved the American economy from stakeholder capitalism to shareholder capitalism, whose sole objective is to maximize shareholder returns.

Shareholder capitalism ushered in an era of excess. In the 1980s it brought junk bond scandals and insider trading. In the 1990s it brought a speculative binge culminating in the bursting of the dotcom bubble. At the urging of Wall Street, Bill Clinton repealed the Glass-Steagall Act, which had separated investment from commercial banking.

In 2001 and 2002 it produced Enron and the corporate looting scandals, revealing not only the dark side of some of the most admired companies in America but also the complicity of Wall Street, many of whose traders were actively involved.

The Street's subsequent gambling in derivatives and risky mortgages resulted in the crash of 2008, and a massive taxpayer-financed bailout.

The Dodd-Frank Act attempted to rein in the Street but Wall Street lobbyists have done everything possible to eviscerate it. Republicans haven't even appropriated sufficient money to enforce it.

The final blow to public morality came when a majority of the Supreme Court decided corporations and wealthy individuals have a right under the First Amendment to spend whatever they wish on elections.

Public morality can't be legislated, but it can be encouraged.

Glass-Steagall must be resurrected. Big banks have to be broken up.

CEO pay must be bridled. Pay in excess of \$1 million shouldn't be deductible from corporate income taxes. Corporations with high ratios of executive pay to typical workers should face higher tax rates than those with lower ratios.

People earning tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars a year should pay the same 70 percent tax rate top earners paid before 1981.

And we must get big money out of politics -- reversing those Supreme Court rulings, providing public financing of elections, and getting full disclosure of the sources of all campaign contributions.

None of this is possible without a broadly based citizen movement to rescue our democracy, take back our economy, and restore a minimal standard of public morality.

America's problems have little to do with what happens in bedrooms, or whether women are allowed to end an unwanted pregnancy. Our problems have everything to do with what occurs in boardrooms, and whether corporations and wealthy individuals are allowed to control our government and undermine our democracy.

Big banks were bailed out during the economic chaos of late 2008, and they emerged bigger and more concentrated than ever. The bank lobby has been striving tirelessly to impede and weaken reforms that were designed to prevent the next economic crisis. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was hobbled by the Trump administration, and its consumer protections were weakened by Trump's bank-friendly appointee to lead the agency, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney. Fossil fuel interests continue to obstruct the ability of the U.S. to take the lead in the global green industrial revolution that is sweeping the world. And Congress can't even pass a modest increase in the minimum wage.

The battle of ideas is intensifying, and the need is growing rapidly for progressive populism to be nurtured, developed and spread. The reactionary lurch brought by Trump and his money-corrupted Cabinet should rouse Americans to take their democracy back. One knowledgeable pundit argues: "Democracy is never given. It must be taken." Or, as Franklin Roosevelt put it, "Democracy is not a static thing. It is an everlasting march." This echoes Thomas Jefferson: "It is time for the country to become fairly radical for a generation."

In 2016, when the nominees for president were Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders represented more liberal ideas, and his candidacy beneficially pushed Hillary toward fairer national plans, particularly on key issues of income inequality, campaign finance reform and international trade policy. Sanders gained great traction among young voters, and this fact should have had long-term positive implications for impetus toward the greater good, even though he did not get enough traction to win the Democratic nomination. In contrast, Donald Trump succeeded by appealing to a similar disaffection with the status quo, but his rude brand of divisive demagogic politics is dangerous, unpredictable and retrogressive, and is thus gravely antithetical to the providential change that is needed.

The Canard of "Class Warfare"

Karl Marx was a German philosopher, economist, sociologist and political revolutionary who lived from 1818 to 1883. He argued in *Capital (Das Kapital)*, a famous tome on economics, that people are alienated from vital aspects of their human nature as a consequence of living in a society stratified into social classes and directed by capitalist goals of extracting profit from the efforts of working people. Marx theorized that escape from this alienation requires revolutionary change. His theories should be understood in the context of the many hardships suffered by 19th century workers in England, France and Germany. The Industrial Revolution had created a seemingly permanent underclass of workers, many of whom lived in dire poverty under terrible working conditions during the times Karl Marx lived, and they had little political representation. *Capital* was based on thirty years of studying social conditions and capitalism in England, which was the most advanced industrial society in Marx's days. Based on these observations, he developed a complex theory about the real structure and function of capitalist systems.

One can just imagine being intimately familiar with the concepts in this weighty tome by Karl Marx, and then picking up a copy of the modern bestselling economics blockbuster, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by French

economist Thomas Piketty. The new twenty-first century understandings are remarkably germane to the increasingly anti-egalitarian nature of our modern economies and societies.

Thomas Piketty's insights into the age-old struggle between Capital and Labor make it clear that the return on Capital generally exceeds the growth rate of economic activity, and labor wages do not. As a result, inequality will continue to become ever more exacerbated as time passes. A new social contract is needed to make our economic system fairer, and to prevent it from becoming too dangerously unfair. For indeed, the United States is, as Thomas Piketty describes it, "a land of extremely brutal inequality, especially in relation to race, whose effects are still quite visible."

It is preposterous to contend that wealth in present-day capitalist systems is based mainly on merit. Piketty characterizes this as "meritocratic extremism," of which he says: "This kind of argument could well lay the groundwork for greater and more violent inequality in the future. The world to come may well combine the worst of two past worlds: both very large inequality of inherited wealth and very high wage inequalities justified in terms of merit and productivity (claims with very little factual basis ...)."

Policymakers are wrong to conclude that extremely wealthy people are "deserving", particularly those who are wealthy because they have inherited huge amounts of money.

Oxfam, an international confederation of 17 organizations that is working in about 100 countries to find good solutions to problems of poverty and injustice around the world, released a report in early 2014 that detailed the shocking economic inequality in America and around the world. The most surprising statistic was that the richest 85 people in the world own as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world's population combined. Eighty-five people together have more wealth than the poorest 3.8 billion people! Oxfam concluded that rigged rules mean that economic growth is increasing "winner-takes-all" for rich elites all over the world.

Thomas Piketty offers this astute conclusion: "Meritocratic extremism can thus lead to a race between super managers and rentiers, to the detriment of those who are neither." And "detriment" is putting it real mildly.

Piketty not only analyzes problems associated with global capitalism, he also prescribes fair-minded solutions, "and he does so with a scrupulous aversion toward ideological assumptions of any kind." The creative proposal for the inequality problem that is most convincing is his radical recommendation that nations of the world assess a one-time "global wealth tax." As Piketty states, this proposed wealth tax should be imposed only on the very wealthy, and it should be used to reduce the highly risky problem of huge public debt worldwide. This would be a modern version of "Jubilee"! As an example, "a flat tax of 15 percent on private wealth would yield nearly a year's worth of national income and thus allow for immediate reimbursement of all outstanding public debt."

Piketty also states: "According to our estimates, the optimal top tax rate in the developed countries is probably above 80 percent." Currently, it is less than 40% in the U.S., and much lower on income earned from capital gains. And Republican politicians reduced this top rate, again, in December 2017.

As one might well imagine, the well-compensated spin doctors for wealthy people are practically apoplectic at Thomas Piketty's provocative blockbuster book because it provides a scholarly exposé of the Achilles heel of capitalist economic systems, which is a societally unacceptable degree of extreme inequality coupled with an overarching propensity to discount or ignore the vital realizations of deep ecology.

American economist Dean Baker has written an important reaction to Piketty's book titled *Economic Policy in a Post-Piketty World*. Dean Baker, no doubt skeptical of the possibility that rich people will ever be required to pay any global wealth tax, describes a "full bag of policy tools" that could be enacted today. These sensible ideas include a robust financial transactions tax, a carbon tax, higher minimum wages, an end to government-sanctioned monopolies in drug patents, and an end to monopoly power in a variety of industries. Let's just do it!

In its annual Executive Paywatch report released in May 2015, the AFL-CIO said that the already astronomical ratio between the pay of CEOs and their workers has been climbing ever higher, jumping to 374-to-one in 2014, up from 331-to-one in 2013. Back in 1980, this ratio was 42-to-1, and in 1965 it was only 24 times the earnings of a typical worker. One wise pundit declared, "What we need as much as higher minimum wages are lower maximum wages!" That may be a very good call.

An argument is often heard from courtiers of the rich that inequality doesn't matter. "Of course it matters. Inequality is what has turned Washington D.C. into a protection racket for the one percent. It buys all those goodies from government: Tax breaks. Tax havens (which allow corporations and the rich to park their money in no-tax zones). Loopholes. Favors like carried interest. And so on."

As Paul Krugman wrote in an essay on Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, "We now know both that the United States has a much more unequal distribution of income than other advanced countries and that much of this difference in outcomes can be attributed directly to government action."

Extremely well-funded lobbyists have a laser-like focus on achieving the narrow objectives of powerful special interest groups. Meanwhile, broader interests are poorly organized and much less focused, so a "tragedy of the common good" phenomenon results, and public policies are sadly skewed against the greater good. Scandalous strategies are utilized by giant corporations to juice up profits, avoid taxes, socialize costs and get bailed out of catastrophic losses. Banks, hedge funds and the Wall Street financial sector indulge in one of the worst cost externalizing schemes of all when they use speculative leverage, unscrupulous opacity, confusing complexity, Big Money influence, and manipulation of government and regulatory agencies to gain special advantages. In doing so, they create systemic risks and heightened potentials for economic hard times, and eventually bailouts are required and even more significant harm is caused to billions of people.

It would be eminently sensible to use public policy to align private ambitions more closely with broad economic goals like financial stability and greater fairness and expanded social mobility. In general, private ambitions create more volatility in our economic system, and this generates big gains for vested interest groups on the upside, and then costs are foisted onto taxpayers when bailouts and emergency measures are required to prevent severe economic downturns.

"Workers in other advanced countries aren't just closing the income gap with Americans, as an article on *The Upshot* reported. They are doing so while working fewer hours. The French work, on average, 491 fewer hours per year than in 1970. The Dutch work 425 fewer hours, and Canadians 215. Americans, by contrast, have reduced their yearly workload by only 112 hours over the last 40 years. Today, Americans work more than employees in most, if not all, rich countries. The extra toil is buying less and less."

While still in the presidential contest in early 2016, Jeb Bush declared that Americans should work longer hours to earn more money. He egregiously ignored the fact that the average American worker already works more hours per year than workers in most other countries. He ignored the fact that a main reason more Americans do not make more money is because almost all the financial benefits of productivity gains made in the previous 35 years went to the top 1% of Americans. He ignored the fact that wages have almost stagnated for the majority of workers, and that only about 10 percent of salaried workers earn overtime pay today, compared to more than 65 percent of salaried workers in 1975. The reason for this change in overtime compensation is that the federal government has allowed the overtime threshold to erode to less than the poverty line for a family four. This change in who is eligible to earn overtime pay has come about mainly because of abuses of power by corporations and wealthy conservatives.

This situation is reminiscent of the biblical story in Exodus, in which the Pharaoh in Egypt some 3,500 years ago ordered slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people to make workers work harder, charging: "They are lazy; that is why they are crying out ... Make the work harder for the people so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." This sounds downright Trumpian!

One of the great hallmarks of a democratic capitalist economic system is a free market designed to assure fairness of competition. Monopoly abuses of power are the antithesis of such a system. Railroad monopolies of a century ago were prime examples of big corporate entities that often used illicit tactics to quash competition, and then took advantage of people and the system to make outlandish profits. When corporations get too big, they almost always abuse their power in ways that prove to be contrary to the best interests of the people. This is why giant corporate "trusts" had to be busted up into less powerful entities a century ago during the Progressive Era. And this is why similarly good plans really should be implemented today.

The bottom line of monopoly power is revealed in an increasing monopoly on wealth that rich people have seized in the last several decades. Outrageously, these people have accomplished this feat by using the power of their excessive influence to get the federal government to borrow money from people in the future to finance tax cuts and allow them to pay tax rates that are historically low on the highest incomes. And Republicans continue using their ill-gotten influence to give rich people bigger and bigger debt-financed tax cuts. This is a swindle!

Voters would be wise to understand the interesting facts in the book *They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010*. The findings are stunning: "The Democratic and Republican Parties are virtual opposites of each other in their economic records, going back to the earliest period for which economic data were available, around 1910. More than a dozen studies have been done comparing economic growth, unemployment, average length of unemployment, stock market performance, inflation, federal debt and other economic indicators during Democratic and Republican presidencies and Congresses -- and they all show stunningly better performance when Democrats are in power than when Republicans are."

These perspectives provide an angular springboard into a better understanding of human motives and impulses.

Introspection into the Catholic Church

Pope Francis articulated some timely, farsighted and eminently responsible perspectives during his visit to Cuba and the United States in late September 2015. In many of the great issues of our time, Pope Francis has become a powerful voice for moral right action and sanity in human affairs. (Hopefully, he will make the prevention of sexual abuses by priests a truer top priority.)

In Cuba, where the pontiff had been instrumental in facilitating a reconciliation between Cuba and its neighbor to the north, Pope Francis encouraged the Cuban people to try to overcome ideological preconceptions and be open to change. *We the People* of the U.S. should also take this advice to heart! After all, our government imposed harsh economic sanctions against Cuba in 1960 and has kept them in force without relenting ever since then, and TEN U.S. Presidents have wanted to overthrow the Castro regime. Diehard conservatives and executives in corporate America are apparently still mad about the assets Fidel Castro nationalized during his revolution in Cuba, and they want to get even. Doggone it, it seems like we still have the Cold War attitude that we need to prove that communist economic systems and societies are evil, and do so by going to extreme measures to undermine them, no matter how terribly harmful to the people living under such governments.

An incalculable amount of hardships have been caused in the lives of billions of people around the world due to our aggressive U.S. foreign policies, trade embargoes, exported economic crises, trade tariffs, wars, political intrigues, military occupations, aerial bombings, and growing opposition to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and Latinos and Muslims in general. Politics has become intensely partisan and excessively rancorous in the USA, and it is more about ego, ambition, power, control impulses and uncompromising stances than achieving common good goals. Our politics has become truly perverse in pandering excessively to wealthy people, with the help of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* rulings and its 2013 evisceration of the Voting Rights Act of 1865, and its failure to defend against extreme partisan gerrymandering. These decisions are corrupting our national decision-making and proving the wrongheadedness of the conservative Justices on the Supreme Court in their narrowly ideological and critically unethical positions on important issues like money in politics, gerrymandering, voting rights and environmental protections. These stances contrast drastically with those of Pope Francis and his much more honorable and wise counsel.

The Pope made a historic address to a joint session of Congress in September 2015, talking primarily about social justice, economic inequality, peaceful coexistence and environmental protections, and he criticized the weapons industry and the death penalty. The intransigence of the Catholic Church on issues of contraception and abortion and homosexuality were the only false notes in his speeches in the United States. Even in this regard, Pope Francis once said "Who am I to judge?" when asked about homosexuality, and he indicated early in his tenure that the Church should shift its emphasis from hot button social issues like contraception, abortion and gay marriage to more important global issues concerning social justice and climate change. (Curiously, in a book released in February 2019 that was timed to coincide with the start of a major Vatican summit on sex abuses, sweeping though unverified claims are made that 80 percent of the Vatican clergy are gay, which would

put an fascinating spin on the Pope's words about judgment. The impact of this book, *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy* by the French journalist Frédéric Martel could help spark necessary reforms.)

The excessive demands, in aggregate, of almost 8 billion needy human beings, and too many greedy ones, is having damaging impacts on the global environmental commons, and these demands are a principal contributing cause to excessive emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. So religious opposition to contraceptives and fair-minded family planning policies is destined to eventually change, and the sooner the better. It may be in the selfish interest of established religions to want to spawn a maximum number of new believers, as fodder to be subjected to priestly indoctrination, but at some point the common good dictates that overly pro-natal and anti-choice policies must change. Population growth, after all, is an underlying problem that is a driving force behind nearly every other intractable big challenge humankind faces.

It is a supreme injustice to legislate blanket prohibitions of abortions even in cases of pregnancies that will kill the mother, or that have been a result of rape or incest. The Roe vs. Wade decision by the Supreme Court in 1973 allowed a safe abortion to any woman in the first trimester of a pregnancy, and it was an eminently reasonable one for women's rights and self-determination in their lives. And with regard to human rights for gay people, codified condemnations and discrimination are not positive aspects of any religion, and religious opposition to basic human rights for gay people must give way to more accepting attitudes and fairer laws.

Conservatives claim they support and defend liberty and freedom from government interference in people's lives, yet they obsess over private morality and generally oppose the freedom for a woman to control her own destiny by choosing to use contraceptives, or to terminate an unwanted pregnancy when circumstances make that choice best for them. Conservatives claim they don't want women to get abortions, yet they obstinately oppose providing contraception services to women that would prevent millions of unwanted pregnancies and abortions every year around the world.

An impressive confirmation of this fact was found in a program in Colorado where health officials offered free long-acting intra-uterine birth control services and hormonal implants to teenage females. The result was that the number of pregnancies among teenage women plunged by 40%, and teen abortions went down by 35%. Colorado Republican state representative Don Coram made this cogent observation, "If you're anti-abortion and also a fiscal conservative, I think this is a win-win situation for you." And it is a big win for teenage females who can control their lives better and avoid dealing with tragic outcomes for them and their potential offspring that are often associated with children being unwanted. And since governments have been slashing spending that would otherwise give poor women and their children healthier and more secure lives, it is a good time to give women more control over their destinies and allow them to not have a child they do not want and cannot afford.

This is a win/win solution that should prosper on its own merits and stand out from opposing viewpoints that claim abortion is absolutely wrong due to zealous and rigid beliefs that it is the unerring will of God for people to "be fruitful and multiply", no matter how negative the consequences.

By expanding family planning programs worldwide to give easier access to contraceptives, surprisingly positive benefits would materialize. According to the respected Guttmacher Institute, "Some 225 million women want to avoid pregnancy but don't use reliable contraception." Providing these women with effective contraception would prevent an estimated 50 million unintended pregnancies each year, and 14 million unsafe abortions and 70,000 maternal deaths. What a great idea in these modern times, and even better when the far-reaching threats and risks posed by population overshoot are taken into account.

A close examination of the strong opposition by conservatives to Planned Parenthood reveals that this issue is not really just about abortion, but instead is a puritanical crusade against women's sexual choices, behaviors, healthcare, social standing and mores. The bottom line is that it is wrong for conservatives to so adamantly undermine Planned Parenthood and health services for poor women, and contraceptive services for females around the world who do not want to get pregnant.

In September 2015, presidential candidate Carly Fiorina looked decisive and combative in the second Republican

primary debate. She gained traction at that time in the competition for support of the conservative Republican base, but part of the approval she received was gained by lying to the audience about Planned Parenthood. She also basically denied the extensive good done through research with fetal stem cells. Millions of lives have been saved or dramatically improved through fetal tissue research that has been made possible by work done at Planned Parenthood and other organizations. "Fetal cells were used to develop the original polio vaccine and are still used to make vaccines for rubella, shingles, chickenpox and an experimental Ebola vaccine. The tissue is critical for studying conditions that affect the health of fetuses and newborn infants, brain injuries in the womb that lead to cerebral palsy, and eye conditions that lead to macular degeneration. Researchers also use it to develop treatments for H.I.V. and breast cancer, diabetes and Parkinson's, among other conditions. In 2014, the National Institutes of Health, a federal agency that spends money only on the research that experts consider most promising, awarded \$76 million in grants for fetal tissue research."

Yogi Berra once famously declared, "You can observe a lot by watching." If one watched the rude grandstanding activities by extreme conservatives in connection with a bizarre Planned Parenthood brouhaha in September 2015, a lot could have been learned. A sign carried by an anti-choice protestor advised, "Pray to End Abortion", though the odds are good that if simple steps were taken to reduce the number of abortions worldwide by millions each year by sponsoring free contraception for women who want it, these hypocritical protestors would howl with puritanical objections. Even Ronald Reagan did not malign the motives of people who help women in Planned Parenthood clinics, and he did not grossly distort the basic facts of the many ways the organization improves the lives of countless numbers of women.

As a presidential candidate in 2016, Senator Marco Rubio concocted a strange story that women are being given an incentive to have an abortion "so that those fetal tissues can be harvested and sold for a profit." This was an outright lie, for Planned Parenthood does not make profits on the sale of stem cell tissues, and it is also an outrageous mischaracterization of the motives for any woman to make the emotionally difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy. If males were the ones to get pregnant, choosing to make a challenging decision to end a pregnancy would no doubt be regarded with much greater respect, acceptance and even congratulations, and male religious authorities would probably even make it a sacrament.

Since Pope Francis has laudably stressed Church doctrines focused on serving the poor, and has reduced his emphasis on those opposed to open-mindedness on hot button social issues, people should recognize the fair-minded nature of this attitude and commend his insistence on the primacy of being compassionate rather than judgmental. The Pope called for a Jubilee of Mercy to forgive sinners in a letter published in September 2015, stating, "I have decided ... to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it."

Importantly, Pope Francis acknowledged the aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church, and relates Christianity to Judaism and Islam, "both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes." Recognizing that mercy is a theme also shared by Jews and Muslims, Pope Francis said: "I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination". Good call, Pope!

The first Jubilee of forgiveness and reconciliation took place more than 700 years ago in the year 1300, and it was not only a compassionate allowance but also a profitable enterprise in Rome. As a result, many Jubilees have taken place since then. The last Jubilee was the "Great Jubilee of 2000", but it was really not all that great. At least, not nearly as great as it should have been, because there was much talk of mercy and reconciliation but very little action regarding the original Old Testament purpose of holding jubilee years - which was "to forgive debts, free slaves and rest the land".

In one of his homilies, Pope Francis said "many question in their hearts: why a Jubilee of Mercy today? Simply because the Church, in this time of great historical change, is called to offer more evident signs of God's presence and closeness. This is not the time to be distracted; on the contrary, we need to be vigilant and to reawaken in

ourselves the capacity to see what is essential."

"In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care."

Time flies, and the Jubilee of Mercy came to an end just before Thanksgiving 2016. And if there is a God, the deity's ways are infinitely inscrutable for having allowed a narcissistic demagogue to seize power in the USA, and to have him obtusely wreak chaos in the world, failing to control the global pandemic and imposing a heartlessly uncompassionate, divisive, discriminatory and anti-environmental agenda on the world.

Merciless Anti-Populist Republican Action

Martin Luther King, Jr. famously made it clear that injustices in health care are the most shocking and inhumane of all the forms of inequality. In June 2017, a small group of Republican politicians in the U.S. Senate -- all of them males -- devised a new proposed national health insurance plan with input from lobbyists for the health insurance industry. They did this in secret, behind closed doors, without any input from Democrats that represent more than half of all Americans. This is a shrewdly arrogant strategy that would affect one-sixth of the U.S. economy. Their narrowly partisan plan would push the arc of the moral universe backwards, deplorably bending it toward injustice. The American people can only hope that Martin Luther King will eventually be proved to be right when he said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

Republican healthcare plans are mean, cruel and heartless because they would sacrifice the health and well-being of tens of millions of people in order to give more tax cuts to the wealthy. Since one of their plans would have cut hundreds of billions of dollars from Medicaid and other programs that help poor people while giving tax breaks to the well-to-do, it would have unconscionably undermined the well-being and security of millions of people, and it would condemn tens of thousands of people to unnecessary suffering and death if they have "preexisting conditions", as if these people don't matter at all. This does not show heart, Trump Republicans. It is shocking and inhumane, and a consequential abuse of power.

A single-payer insurance system would be much fairer and more beneficial to the vast majority of Americans than either Obamacare or proposed Trumpcare plans, for it would restructure our healthcare system in ways beneficial to the masses, not mainly to fortunate people and the wealthy, and it would be less detrimental to tens of millions of Americans, especially including poor people, women, children, blacks, Latinos and immigrants.

The Nature of Human Motivations and Compulsions

The eminently respect-worthy philosophers John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts were naturalists who gained some fascinating insights into the nature and character of many different species of marine animals -- and of humankind by inference -- when they spent six weeks in March and April 1940 aboard the 75-foot vessel named the *Western Flyer* on the Sea of Cortez. At the time of this voyage, World War II was raging in Europe, so these two naturalists were particularly interested in the profound implications of their observations for deeper motives revealed in human nature. Listen in:

"We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits, so that we say, 'This species typically does thus and so.' But we do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well. When it seems that men may be kinder to men, that wars may not come again, we completely ignore the record of our species. If we used the same smug observation on ourselves that we do on hermit crabs, we would be forced to say, with the information at hand, 'It is one diagnostic trait of *Homo sapiens* that groups of individuals are periodically infected with a feverish nervousness which causes the individuals to turn on and destroy, not only his own kind, but the works of his own kind. It is not known whether this be caused by a virus, some airborne spore, or whether it be a species reaction to some

meteorological stimulus as yet undetermined.' Hope, which is another species diagnostic trait -- the hope that this may not always be -- does not in the least change the observable past and present. When two crayfish meet, they usually fight. One would say that perhaps they might not at a future time, but without some mutation it is not likely that they will lose this trait. And perhaps our species is not likely to forego war without some psychic mutation which at present, at least, does not seem imminent. And if one places the blame for killing and destroying on economic insecurity, on inequality, on injustice, he is simply stating the proposition in another way. We have what we are. Perhaps the crayfish feels the itch of jealousy, or perhaps he is sexually insecure. The effect is that he fights. When in the world there shall come twenty, thirty, fifty years without evidence of our murder trait, under whatever system of justice or economic security, then we may have a contrasting habit pattern to examine. So far there is no such situation. So far the murder trait of our species is as regular and observable as our various sexual habits."

Damn interesting, Doc and John! When we clearly see that every specific species of marine animal in the sea has its own relatively unique animal nature and behaviors and habits, it is natural to turn the spotlight of this objective understanding onto the most interesting animal subject of all -- ourselves! Human beings have evolved over thousands of generations of our ancestors into beings with distinct instinctual traits and socially and culturally adapted characteristics. Many species of social mammals exhibit strong drives of alpha males to achieve dominance in their social hierarchies, and to achieve sexual dominance and reproductive success to pass their genes on to the next generation.

Natural selection honed human males and females in clan groups into beings that filled advantageous gender roles so as to cope with the exigencies of existence as hunters and gatherers, and this adaptive evolution made cooperative endeavors crucially important. Then, as the Agricultural Revolution allowed nomadic people to settle down and grow crops and raise domesticated animals, civilizing influences toned down aggression and sculpted human beings and their cultures into new directions and behavioral patterns. Fights between males for physical supremacy and reproductive success gave way to different gender and family roles and morals on the farm, and then with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and increasing urbanization and changing parental economics and morphing sexual mores and new contraceptive methods, modern struggles between the sexes have come into being. Politicians profitably, though unethically, mine this strife with crafty intention.

Revealingly, the patriotic fighting men's song *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* contains lyrics that glorify war and righteousness in the name of God:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
 His truth is marching on.
 Glory, glory, hallelujah
 His truth is marching on.

This war song provided John Steinbeck with the title of his great novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, which told the story of travails suffered by tenant farmers during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. I myself prefer truer truths, like the story of those tenant farmers forced to flee the crushing conditions in the Midwest, to other wildly contrasting stories about supernatural deities and their supposed enthusiasms for glory, judgment, battle and supremacy. The entire story of the advent of monotheism is a fascinating one, involving King Tutankhamun's father Akhenaten in ancient Egypt, and the sun god Aten that had been merely one among many deities that populated the most imaginative of all pantheons of deities in the history of civilization.

The important point here is that the monotheistic idea of One and Only One True God has become one of the most conflict-engendering ideologies in human history, and one that threatens peaceful coexistence as the planet gets ever more crowded. So the assertion that monotheistic religions are more true and sophisticated than earlier polytheistic religions pales in the face of the fact that polytheism had one great and overarching advantage: no one was ever inspired to wage a holy war against other people to attain glorious conquest over those who believe in a different God. Today, conflicts between Christians and Muslims pose existential threats to peaceful coexistence

in many countries, and we need to find better ways to defuse violent conflicts over religious beliefs. Official Golden Rule acceptance of every person regardless of their particular religious beliefs is the best idea and the safest national stance. Too much dangerous strife and too many costly wars have been -- and are being -- caused by religious zealotry. And this form of extremism is an unnecessary source of divisiveness, conflict, fear, suspicion and hate.

"A return to first principles in a republic is sometimes caused by the simple virtues of one man. His good example has such an influence that the good men strive to imitate him, and the wicked are ashamed to lead a life so contrary to his example."

--- Niccolo Machiavelli

The whole concept of an imageless male God humanized in a form of mortal manifestation of a divine Son and a Holy Spirit was rudely and harshly cut off from earlier concepts of deities that were more holistic because they included a female Mother Goddess and a divine Daughter and a Holy Soul. Humanity has undergone maybe 200 millennia of evolutionary change as *Homo sapiens*, and our evolving genetic and cultural human nature has been honed by natural selection to have a propensity for beliefs in supernatural beings.

Nonetheless, let us admit that the Christian God is no more likely to exist as imagined or proclaimed than the God of Islam or the God of Judaism, or for that matter the God of Zoroastrians or any other monotheistic religious faith. The truth is that an aspect of human nature makes us susceptible to clinging to indoctrinated beliefs that there is One and Only One True God, but this certainly doesn't mean that any such proclaimed God really exists as envisioned.

Mark Twain wrote his own satirical version of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, titled simply *The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Updated*. He did so as a parody of American imperialism in the wake of the Philippine-American War. It is written with the same tune, and sung with the same cadence as the original *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, which was created in 1861 by Julia Ward Howe, a social reform activist and outspoken advocate for the abolition of slavery. Here are Mark Twain's scathing and sardonic lyrics:

Mine eyes have seen the orgy of the launching of the Sword;
He is searching out the hoardings where the stranger's wealth is stored;
He hath loosed his fateful lightnings, and with woe and death has scored;
His lust is marching on.

I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded him an altar in the Eastern dews and damp;
I have read his doomful mission by the dim and flaring lamps --
His night is marching on.

I have read his bandit gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my pretensions, so with you my wrath shall deal;
Let the faithless son of Freedom crush the patriot with his heel;
Lo, Greed is marching on!"

We have legalized the strumpet and are guarding her retreat;
Greed is seeking out commercial souls before his judgment seat;
O, be swift, ye clods, to answer him! Be jubilant my feet!
Our god is marching on!

In a sordid slime harmonious Greed was born in yonder ditch,
With a longing in his bosom -- and for others' goods an itch.
As Christ died to make men holy, let men die to make us rich --
Our God is marching on.

Peripheral Psychological Insights

It is noteworthy that Sigmund Freud developed revolutionary understandings of the unconscious mind, beginning in

the 1890s and early decades of the 20th century. Remember that the subconscious part of our brains is where modern scientists have determined that 97% of all thinking takes place. While Sigmund Freud used his psychoanalysis techniques for "talking cures" and other healing treatments, his nephew Edward Bernays turned his attentions to more lucrative and nefarious uses of understandings of crowd psychology and the subconscious mind. He helped create a hyper-consumer culture through sneaky subliminal advertising, and he invented "public relations" that used shrewdly targeted spin and propaganda to "engineer consent" and achieve tighter control over the masses. These new forms of propaganda advanced the agendas of political leaders and wealthy elite groups that have always sought to impose authoritarian control and oligarchic goals on the people in Western democracies. This unfortunately often involved deceit and repressive measures.

The most extreme political propaganda activities achieved by Edward Bernays were conducted on behalf of the U.S. government and the multinational corporation United Fruit Company (which is Chiquita Brands International, today). These clandestine activities helped overthrow Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954, who was the democratically elected president of Guatemala. Surely, public relations and advertising should be much more consistently used for positive purposes, and appeal to more virtuous and socially-just motives in empathetic human character rather than to materialism, greed, domineering control and base human drives and desires.

The 20th century was remarkably individualistic and self-centered. Now it seems obvious that we need to shift to making a greater emphasis in the 21st century on the overall well-being of our kind. I believe strongly that a maximum of individual freedoms should be assured to peoples everywhere, within a greater context of being responsible and striving to achieve common good goals for society as a whole. This goal should include broader considerations for the prospects of our children and theirs, and all our descendants far into the future.

Adam Curtis, a British documentary filmmaker, has a convincing narrative voice and provides brilliantly incisive Big History narratives in his films, and he has a valuable big picture way of understanding the forces that influence human fate. For instance, Curtis gives provocative perspective in *The Century of the Self* about the story of Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna and his nephew Edward Bernays. He explains clearly how Sigmund Freud had revolutionized understandings of the human unconscious mind for purposes of helping to heal mental afflictions, and how Edward Bernays later used understandings of human motives to manipulate people for commercial promotion and rather nefarious political purposes.

Adam Curtis produced a film titled *Bitter Lake* that traces the history of Afghanistan from the period of the British Taj through an agreement by President Franklin Roosevelt and the Wahhabi king of Saudi Arabia that was about American and Saudi influence in the Middle East, on through the Russian occupation of Afghanistan and the role of Osama bin Laden and the mujahedeen in driving the Russians out, and then the U.S. invasion and protracted and ruthless military actions there. This is an enlightening story of U.S. military occupations of the region that have destabilized the Arab world and led to assaults by the barbaric Islamic State.

This tale is built on Adam Curtis' earlier film *The Power of Nightmares*, which pointed out the striking parallel between the rise in recent decades of Islamism in the Arab world and neoconservatism in the USA. This film provocatively explores the zealotry by factions in both regions to inflate a myth of a dangerous enemy in order to give support to hawkish partisans. Curtis' interesting contention is corroborated by author John Fowles.

In *The Aristos*, John Fowles states that strong opposition countersupports what it opposes. For instance, after the CIA helped overthrow Iran's democratically elected government in 1953 and install the Shah of Iran as Iran's leader, the Shah ruled with the help of an iron-fisted SAVAK secret police that suppressed dissent for 25 years. In reaction, religious ayatollahs vituperatively charged the United States as being "the Great Satan" for sponsoring imperialism, political intrigue and corruption throughout the world -- and after overthrowing the Shah in 1979, they have ruled exceedingly ruthlessly. Political propaganda has been used effectively in nations worldwide, and it sure seems like peoples everywhere would be better off with less ideology and more honesty and fairness from their governments!

Big History on Steroids

What's the story, morning glory?

What's the word, hummingbird?

I am passionately appreciative of Big History explanations of important ideas and incisive understandings of the nature of human beings and their affairs. "In the beginning", says the Bible, there was nothing, nothing at all, nothing other than an omnipotent and omniscient male God who was lonely and in need of people to worship Him, so He created the first man and the first woman, and He was filled with love and concern for the fates of faithful believers, and He apparently had a powerful desire for obedience and an infinite potential for jealousy and retribution against anyone who might choose to worship some other god or goddess that would lay claim to the credit for Creation. Religious authorities seize this mantle and castigate all threats to God's supremacy -- and to the Promotions Department of the religious establishments that strive to gain and retain the obedience of the faithful. It is noteworthy that for thousands of years before the Bible sprung into human consciousness, many hundreds of deities were imagined and worshipped in human cultures around the globe. "God" didn't exist.

Religious faith in a monotheistic God has been the source of violent struggles around the world ever since King Tut's father concocted this idea in Egypt some 1,400 years before the Three Wise Men supposedly found Baby Jesus in a crib in Jerusalem. Jonathan Kirsch gives readers a thought-provoking story in *God Against the Gods - The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*. He tells this fascinating tale of how the idea of One and Only One True God came into being in ancient Egypt, at a time that people still worshipped the richest polytheistic pleonasm of deities ever conceived in any civilization.

One of the most glaring disadvantages of religions that postulate One and Only One True God is that, because of their absolute convictions, they condemn "pagan" deities and everyone who holds differing beliefs. Absurdly, they consider earlier believers to be, in retroactive condemnation, heretical infidels -- inferior and evil to boot!

I myself feel that the value of religious tolerance in societies today is much greater than the value of any honorable obedience to strict doctrines, dogmas and commandments of any particular God, or of any one faith. The belated arrival of a spiffy new and oh!-so-much-more sophisticated monotheistic belief system seems disingenuous and facile, and the fact that it is so effective in manipulating people by insidiously promulgating commandments and imposing moralistic, judgmental and guilt-inducing feelings in believers makes it less than honorable or socially acceptable.

Centuries after the ill-fated Egyptian experiment in monotheism, the spark of that idea was fanned into a new religious story of an Almighty God Yahweh and his people, led by Moses and Abraham, and that story in the Old Testament was transmogrified a thousand years later with a New Testament. Faith in the God of the Talmud and the Old Testament slowly spread across the Middle East and Europe during the early centuries after Jesus Christ was proclaimed the Messiah.

Then a competing Islamic story sprang into being in the head of Mohammad, a seventh century visionary who dreamed a revelatory religious tale of a different One and Only True God. Mohammad proclaimed the absolute and eternal truth of Allah, and against improbable odds managed to spread this Word with the Sword across the deserts of Arabia. Medina, located near the Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula, became the first Muslim city. It was a trading center on a caravan route that prospered when war between the Byzantine and Persian empires interrupted sea trade between India and the Mediterranean Sea. Travel along this route was largely controlled by the Quraysh, an extended family that had both nomadic and sedentary members.

Mohammed had been born in the Hashim clan of the Quraysh about 571 CE. The Hashim were settled residents of Mecca, another town on the overland caravan route. Mohammed married well and prospered as a merchant, and became a leading citizen of Mecca by the early 7th century. In 611, while resting in a cave, Mohammed heard a voice that he believed came from an all-powerful deity. The voice offered instructions on how to purify religion. In the town of Mecca, there was a pre-Islamic religious site called Kabaa, a large granite masonry structure that was roughly the shape of a cube and was covered by a black silk cloth decorated with gold-embroidered calligraphy and had as its eastern cornerstone a Black Stone that is generally thought to be a remnant of a meteorite. There were also many other religions throughout the region, including Judaism, Byzantine Christianity, and Persian Zoroastrianism. Various forms of Zoroastrianism had been the world's most powerful religion from around 600 BCE to 650 CE, and Zoroastrianism served as the state religion of pre-Islamic empires in the region. Following the

Muslim conquest of Persia, Zoroastrianism was harshly suppressed or otherwise integrated into Islam from the 7th century onwards.

When Mohammed began to speak about his religious revelations in Mecca, this aggravated the priests of the Kabaa, so he was expelled from that city in 622. Mohammed left Mecca and followed the caravan route to Medina, whose economy was booming thanks to the thriving caravan trade, and its population included various ethnic groups who resided in their own neighborhoods. There does not seem to have been a town government in 622, because while the leaders of each ethnic group could settle disputes among its own members, there was no peaceful way to settle disputes between members of different ethnic groups.

After Mohammed arrived, he showed himself to be a fair judge of disputes, and during the next eight years he became an influential citizen of Medina. As the residents accepted Mohammed's rules about justice and his teachings concerning the nature of the all-powerful Allah, the population of the town became the first Muslims. In 630, they followed Mohammed's call to conquer Mecca, and they succeeded.

Mohammed did not leave behind a written version of his teachings, but he spoke to a lot of people and many of his listeners recorded his words. Over time, their contributions were assembled into a book of scripture called the Quran. The main reforms introduced by Islam included the monotheistic idea that the faithful should submit to a single universal deity and the possibility of a direct personal relationship between each human and the deity.

In practice, Islam created a greatly simplified religion. There were no saints, no sacraments, no official clergy and no religious buildings. Instead, people who learned the most about Islam taught other people, and religious rituals could take place almost anywhere. A practicing Muslim was required to do only five things:

- profess faith in Allah as the only god
- pray to Mecca five times a day
- practice charity (payment of the Zakat or 1/50th)
- make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)
- fast during the month of Ramadan to commemorate the conquest of Mecca in 630.

If a Muslim followed the rules, he or she could supposedly expect to reach paradise, which was described using metaphors like flowing rivers, gardens, fountains, fruit and no need to work. If they did not adhere to the rules, then they went to hell, a place divided into boiling water and the abyss of fire, and was populated by angels whose job was to torture sinners who were condemned to be there.

Mohammed has been interpreted as being the last of a series of prophets that included Abraham, Moses and Jesus. All three of these prophets were sent by the same all-powerful deity, and each one's teachings led to the creation of a new form of monotheism.

In the year 632 CE, only two years after his followers conquered Mecca, Mohammed died. He did not leave any instructions about who would take his place, so a violent dispute followed over the succession of leadership. Abu Bakr, the father-in-law of Mohammed's second wife, defeated Omar, Mohammed's son-in-law. This was the beginning of the terrible schism between Sunni and Shia sects of Islam, which is causing so much injustice and turmoil and dangerous conflict in the world today, like that between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Abu Bakr defended and expanded his authority by unleashing jihad holy war against the Byzantine and Persian empires to the north, and was aided when peasants in the provinces revolted and joined the Muslim invasion. After Abu Bakr died in 634, Omar took over the jihad and it continued, conquering Damascus in 636, Jerusalem in 638, Cairo (a Byzantine fortress) in 639, Alexandria in 640, and the entire Persian Empire by 651. However, challengers to Omar's rule were many, and he was assassinated in 644. Members of the powerful Umayyid family of Mecca took over in 660 and founded a dynasty that lasted until 750. Followers of Islam continued to spread the religion westward along the Mediterranean coast of North Africa, and they reached Tunisia by 670, where they constructed their main base inland at Kairawan (south of Tunis), where it was safe from both the Christian Byzantine navy and inland Berbers of the mountains and desert.

Centuries of Carthaginian, Greek and Roman rule along the coast of North Africa had created increasingly efficient levels of taxation and exploitive rule, so Muslim rule may have seemed much less demanding and strict to the

coastal Berbers than earlier Roman rule. In contrast, the Muslims represented just another group of outsiders, to the inland Berbers, that wanted to impose their oppressive rule on the local people.

By 711, Umayyid armies campaigned in the region, but couldn't totally subdue it. Coastal Berbers who resented centralized Christianity converted readily to Islam, but interior Berbers resisted Islam as strongly as they resisted Christianity. Coastal Berbers joined the Muslim invasion and launched an attack into Spain, followed later by Umayyid Arab forces. By 720, Muslim forces controlled everything south of the Pyrenees Mountains, the modern border between France and Spain. In 732, an expedition across the mountains was turned back from Poitiers after it suffered defeat at the hands of a Frankish army led by Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne. This made Charles Martel a hero and increased the prestige of the Franks, setting the stage for Pope Stephen II to designate Martel's son Pepin the Short as king of the Franks. By stalling the advance of Muslim forces, it also bought time for European Christians to organize themselves to defend against the Umayyids. Less than a generation later, after the Abbassids overthrew the Umayyids, the new leaders redirected efforts at expansion away from Europe towards India.

The early 8th century was the time when Muslim strength and unity were at their greatest. As a result of their efforts, Muslims cut off Africa from Mediterranean Europe and cut off Coptic Christians in Nubia and Ethiopia from Christians in Europe. The North African coastal territories provided points of departure for Muslim expansion southward across the Sahara Desert. However, the Muslim world was stretched out over an enormous distance, making it difficult to maintain a centralized government.

The strains of constant expansion finally resulted in a revolt against the Umayyids in 750. A new ruling dynasty, the Abbassids, was more interested in eastern expansion, so the spread of Islam in Africa slowed. The new dynasty moved the capital from Damascus, in present day Syria, to Baghdad, in present day Iraq.

Since the military and cultural success of the spread of Islam threatened Christianity, a long series of Crusades were galvanized and launched from European countries beginning in 1096, and they persisted for about two hundred years, at great personal and financial expense. The Crusades began with a holy war to take Jerusalem back from Muslim rule, to which it had been subjected in the centuries after Muslims conquered the Levant.

The only King of France ever to be made a saint by the Catholic Church was King Louis IX, who was canonized Saint Louis in the year 1297. He was accorded that honor 27 years after he died in Tunisia of dysentery while on a chivalrous crusade against Islamic peoples who had conquered all of North Africa back in the 7th century. Many of the accomplishments of King Louis lived after him, serving as beacons of light and revealing the best of the Middle Ages. Even his failures mark him as a man of his time, most notably his two ill-fated crusades. Louis wrote out his ideas of government in a set of precepts that he gave to his son, Philip. They say, in essence: "Love God, do justice, and serve the poor."

During the so-called "golden century of Saint Louis", the kingdom of France was at its height in Europe, both politically and economically. Saint Louis was regarded as "the first among equals" among the kings and rulers of the continent. He commanded the biggest army and ruled the largest and wealthiest kingdom, which was the European center of arts and intellectual thought at the time. He laid the foundations for the famous college of theology later known as the Sorbonne in Paris in 1257. The prestige and respect felt in Europe for King Louis IX were due to the attraction that his benevolent personality created, more than to military domination. For his contemporaries, he was the quintessential example of a Christian prince, and he embodied the whole of Christendom in his person. His reputation for saintliness and fairness was already well established while he was alive, and on many occasions he was chosen as an arbiter in quarrels among the rulers of Europe.

The perception of Louis IX as the exemplary Christian prince was reinforced by his religious zeal. Louis was a devout Catholic, and he built the Sainte-Chapelle ("Holy Chapel"), located within the royal palace complex on the *Île de la Cité* in the center of Paris.

Today, a barbaric Islamic State struggles to gain permanent influence in the Middle East in Syria and Iraq and other nations, and it gained surprising success due to the destabilizing effect that the U.S. invasions and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq had on the region. This strikes an ironic parallel to the early expansion of

Islamic influence in the Arab world, when Muslim conquests were facilitated by conflicts between the Persian and Byzantine empires that exhausted them both, militarily and economically, as a consequence of the decades they spent fighting one another.

Curiously, here in the 21st century, conflict between Islam and Christianity continues to be extremely costly and to pose great threats to many people. A nuclear deal between Iran and six Western nations created much rancor from hard-right conservatives in the U.S., and many of the most extreme partisans in this group disparage Muslims as "Islamofascists". Trump reactively withdrew the U.S. from this international agreement for his own narrow perceived advantages. The threats to world peace of these developments and attitudes are so significant that we need to honor John Lennon's words, and redouble efforts to *Give Peace a Chance!*

Perspicacious Observations Conveyed by Angular Unconformists

An angular unconformist is a kind of philosopher with a melioristic worldview who sees things with a penetrating penchant for timeless right understanding. Let's turn our attention to the Vatican church hierarchy, which is composed of a bunch of old men. Few groups of people are less amenable to change than powerful old men, so you can bet Pope Francis' strong advocacy for social justice and poor folks, and for strong action to mitigate climate change, is making many of them damn uneasy, even if the Pope is channeling Jesus and some of the most honorable of the saints. And the conservative fringe in the U.S. is even more apoplectic and outspoken.

Soon after Pope Francis declared in Cuba that the people need to be less ideological and more open to change, Andrew Napolitano, a senior judicial analyst at Fox News expressed the most incongruous idea imaginable: "Now, here comes Pope Francis to use moral relativism to take the Church in two dangerous directions. The first is an assault on the family, and the second is an assault on the free market -- two favorite political targets of the left.

He was referring to the Pope's weakening of "the sacrament of matrimony by making annulments easier to obtain," and his alleged advocacy of the "government-mandated redistribution of wealth." Andrew Napolitano continued his simplistic ideological diatribe: "The pope has seriously disappointed those who believe the Roman Catholic Church preserves and teaches the Truth. The Truth is Christ risen and unity with Him. It is not a debate about the minimum wage or air conditioning."

I guess Andrew Napolitano finds absolute Truth in his rancorous and distorted beliefs, even though they seem to be not even relatively true, to independent observers. What is true is that the world will be a much better and safer place if humankind respects precautionary principles instead of rashly remaining in ideological lockstep with exploiters of resources and manipulators of public opinion.

Andrew Napolitano went on: "Pope Francis is popular on the world stage, and the crowds love him. But if he fails in his basic duties as the pope, if his concern is more for secular than sacred, if he aids the political agenda of the atheistic left, he is a false prophet leading his flock to a dangerous place, where there is more central planning and less personal liberty." Jesus!

The Pope is a false prophet? Really? One conservative Republican was so upset at the prospect that the Pope would say something he didn't like during the Pope's historic speech to Congress that he boycotted the event. Rep. Paul Gosar explained: "Media reports indicate His Holiness intends to focus the brunt of his speech on climate change -- a climate that has been changing since first created in Genesis. More troubling is the fact that this climate change talk has adopted all of the socialist talking points, wrapped false science and ideology into 'climate justice' and is being presented to guilt people into leftist policies. If the Pope stuck to standard Christian theology, I would be the first in line. If the Pope spoke out with moral authority against violent Islam, I would be there cheering him on. If the Pope urged the Western nations to rescue persecuted Christians in the Middle East, I would back him wholeheartedly. But when the Pope chooses to act and talk like a leftist politician, then he can expect to be treated like one. The columnist Maureen Mullarkey in effect communicated this fallacy stating, 'When papal preferences, masked in a Christian idiom, align themselves with ideological agendas (e.g. radical environmentalism), they impinge on democratic freedoms and sanctity of the individual.'"

"So at this pivotal moment in world history, His Holiness, Pope Francis, is intending to spend the majority of his

time on one of the world's greatest stages focusing on climate change. I have both a moral obligation and leadership responsibility to call out leaders, regardless of their titles, who ignore Christian persecution and fail to embrace opportunities to advocate for religious freedom and the sanctity of human life. If the Pope plans to spend the majority of his time advocating for flawed climate change policies, then I will not attend. It is my hope that Pope Francis realizes his time is better spent focusing on matters like religious tolerance and the sanctity of all life. As the leader of the Catholic Church, and as a powerful voice for peace throughout the world, His Holiness has a real opportunity to change the climate of slaughter in the Middle East ... not the fool's errand of climate change."

Wow! -- Here is one of Arizona's political representatives in the House of Representatives who was not open to even hearing Pope Francis speak because he was afraid to hear views that contradicted his staunch ideological ones. The perspective that humanity has a moral obligation to act to mitigate global warming would just have been too offensive for him to hear, so he boycotted the Pope's speech to our representatives in Congress. I imagine him figuratively sticking his fingers in his ears and bleating like an outraged schoolyard bully having a temper tantrum. Surely climate change denial is growing increasingly irresponsible as costs mount and the evidence of human impacts on the benign stability of normal weather patterns grows increasingly apparent.

Listen to that contention again: Congressman Gosar stated that "Pope Francis has "adopted all of the socialist talking points, wrapped false science and ideology into 'climate justice' and is being presented to guilt people into leftist policies." Now that is fiercely and idiotically ideological spin! Again, remember that Pope Francis asked the Cuban people to try to overcome ideological preconceptions and be open to change -- and surely he would mean that that should apply to the people in the United States, who are subjected to such intense barrages of brainwashing as to be startling, especially during elections.

"If we would learn what the human race really is at bottom, we need only observe it at election time."

--- Mark Twain

In his first papal treatise, the Pope wrote in his encyclical on climate change about an "economy of exclusion," where "human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded". This is a reality for tens of millions of Americans, and not merely a leftist talking point! And the Pope wrote about the "new idolatry of money," which derives from "the denial of the primacy of the human person". The influence of money unquestionably dictates much in our democracy. And he expressed the opinion that we have "a financial system which rules rather than serves". In the disastrous and extraordinarily costly aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, this seems to be more often than not true. Pope Francis also wrote about rampant inequality that spawns violence. These perspectives deserve closer and fairer consideration, and a more holistic hearing!

Pope Francis published a broad 256-page proclamation on family life just one week before Good Friday in 2016, calling again for the Roman Catholic Church to be more welcoming and less judgmental. The document -- known as an apostolic exhortation was titled "Amoris Laetitia," Latin for "The Joy of Love" -- and it called for priests to welcome single parents, gay people and unmarried straight couples who are living together.

Hey, if the leader of one of the biggest religious establishments in the world can be more flexible in attitudes towards people it has previously condemned, maybe all religious folks can do the truly spiritual thing and act in a more civilized manner by altering their judgmental biases against others -- and supporting other changes to overturn laws that discriminate against classes of people like gays, unmarried men and women, and non whites!

The Pope makes it clear that no top-down rule changes or edicts will be made in the Church, possibly because of the extent to which the Church embodies such a markedly fractious global network of bishops and priests. But he clarifies the vision he wants local bishops and priests to follow: "as a church that greets families with empathy and comfort rather than with unbending rules and rigid codes of conduct." Hallelujah!

Pope Francis called for governments to provide better support for families in the form of health care, education and employment, and he described families as under siege by the pressures of modern life. "In many cases, parents come home exhausted, not wanting to talk, and many families no longer even share a common meal," Francis wrote. He described "severe stress" on families "who often seem more caught up with securing their future than with

enjoying the present."

The Pope also dedicated several passages to the importance of women's rights, in a pronounced contrast to his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who was criticized for his accusations against women who "seek power." And he fairly said that "every person regardless of sexual orientation" should be treated with respect and consideration, while "every sign of unjust discrimination is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence."

The Pope's tone and adaptive populism is encouraging, but there is a long way to go for the Church to evolve on other issues, like its opposition to contraception and to fuller roles for women in the church. The Pope obviously "has to consider his church's restive conservative flank, which is already angry with him for daring to embrace a wider variety of people and choosing to focus his ire on the failings of capitalism. Francis has a fine needle to thread. His message may be quiet, but it's still progressive: The church must meet the people where they are."

Pope Francis had earlier encouraged people to talk with each other and make communication more authentic and humane. He has written: "In a world where people often curse, use foul language, speak badly of others, sow discord and poison our human environment by gossip, the family can teach us to understand communication as a blessing. In situations apparently dominated by hatred and violence, where families are separated by stone walls or the no less impenetrable walls of prejudice and resentment, where there seem to be good reasons for saying "enough is enough", it is only by blessing rather than cursing, by visiting rather than repelling, and by accepting rather than fighting, that we can break the spiral of evil, show that goodness is always possible, and educate our children to fellowship."

He continued: "Today the modern media, which are an essential part of life for young people in particular, can be both a help and a hindrance to communication in and between families. The media can be a hindrance if they become a way to avoid listening to others, to evade physical contact, to fill up every moment of silence and rest, so that we forget that 'silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist.' The media can help communication when they enable people to share their stories, to stay in contact with distant friends, to thank others or to seek their forgiveness, and to open the door to new encounters. By growing daily in our awareness of the vital importance of encountering others, these 'new possibilities', we will employ technology wisely, rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it. Here too, parents are the primary educators, but they cannot be left to their own devices. The Christian community is called to help them in teaching children how to live in a media environment in a way consonant with the dignity of the human person and service of the common good."

And Pope Francis said: "The great challenge facing us today is to learn once again how to talk to one another, not simply how to generate and consume information. The latter is a tendency which our important and influential modern communications media can encourage. Information is important, but it is not enough. All too often things get simplified, different positions and viewpoints are pitted against one another, and people are invited to take sides, rather than to see things as a whole." There is a kernel of great value in these words.

An Egregious Example of Miscommunication

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren has been a target of sensational accusations inspired by ideology and money-fueled propaganda. For instance, the Missouri Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer, a senior member of the House Financial Services Committee, told a conference of the American Bankers Association that Elizabeth Warren is the "Darth Vader of the financial services world." Elizabeth Warren responded, "My first thought was: *Really?* I've always seen myself more as a Princess Leia-type -- a Senator and resistance general who, unlike the guys, is never even remotely tempted by the dark side." Ha!

Blaine Luetkemeyer also told bankers that they should "find a way to neuter" Elizabeth Warren. "Why would he go out of his way to say something so sexist and offensive?", Warren wondered. "Is he hostile to all women Clueless? Afraid? And then I had a second thought: This is all about money."^[11] Then she added: "Congressman Luetkemeyer was on a panel about the "changing political landscape" in a room full of Wall Street bankers -- powerful people who have been working for years to roll back financial reform. Trying to land the best zinger with

my name is just one more way to earn chits and try to cash in big time with that audience." ... "Luetkemeyer is a Wall Street yes-man, and the financial industry has rewarded him handsomely for his reliability. Since first running for Congress in 2008, he's received nearly a million dollars from the big banks, hedge funds and credit card companies -- and he's taken \$50,000 specifically from the American Bankers Association."

Yes, folks, this is sadly our money-corrupted political system in wrongheaded action! After declaring that Senator Warren needed to be "neutered" to prevent the implementation of Wall Street reforms, Luetkemeyer disdainfully refused to admit how crude and condescending his comments were. He not only refused to apologize, but wasn't even embarrassed at his words. In fact, he tried to fool people into thinking he had said something different by having his office double down on his offensive remarks in a Missouri newspaper: "It's no secret that Congressman Luetkemeyer is a vocal opponent of Dodd-Frank (banking reforms). The Congressman's comments earlier this week were in reference to the need to neutralize Elizabeth Warren's influence on these important issues. Any other characterizations of the Congressman's comments are inaccurate." Elizabeth Warren responded, "So let me get this straight: Congressman Luetkemeyer doesn't seem to know the difference between removing my reproductive organs like an animal or making me shut my mouth -- but he doesn't really care because he believes Wall Street should be able to cheat American families and break our economy again and I need to be pushed out of his way?" (Touché!)

This embarrassing Missouri congressman is not fairly representing real people on Main Street with his arrogant stances, for it is blatantly obvious that he is representing Wall Street vested interests. Earlier in his career, he supported de-regulation of the lending industry that, at some point, charged veterans 300% interest rates. "Studies have shown that these unethical lending practices have cost veterans a third of their income, which often times they are unable to pay back and so they are caught in a cycle of poverty where they seek other loans from similar lenders." Real nice resume, Congressman! Voters, throw him out of office.

The Source of Ideas about an Angular Unconformity

This rush of ideas cascades into my mind like an incoming tide at the Bay of Fundy, where a high tide arrives at the speed of a galloping horse. This makes me think again of the angular unconformity found in Box Canyon in Ouray, Colorado. The Ute Chief Ouray was the most prominent Native American leader in western Colorado back in the 19th century. He became famous for his efforts to avoid violent strife between the natives and the miners and pioneers who came to Colorado seeking their fortunes or new lives on the frontier. It was apparently the manifest destiny of Native American peoples to be wiped out by ruthless miners and settlers, and to have their cultures largely destroyed, and to experience the wrenching deprivation of having their ancestral lands taken away from them, and then being sent to live in undesirable locales on Indian reservations.

During Chief Ouray's life (circa 1833 to 1880), prospectors found gold, silver and other minerals on traditional Ute lands. This inevitably led to violent conflicts between encroaching miners and the Utes, and Chief Ouray was instrumental in helping the U.S. government acquire the mineral-rich land in the San Juan Mountains that miners wanted. Chief Ouray sought reconciliation between peoples, believing that Indian wars against white men would likely mean the destruction of the Ute tribe. Other Utes were understandably much more militant, and considered him a coward, derogatorily calling him *The White Man's Friend*. An article in 2012 indicates, "He sought peace among tribes and whites, and a fair shake for his people, though Ouray was dealt a sad task of liquidating a once-mighty force that ruled nearly 23 million acres of the Rocky Mountains." As an article written in 1928 about Chief Ouray in the *Denver Post* read, "He saw the shadow of doom on his people".

Speaking of Native Americans, Pope Francis canonized Father Junipero Serra as a saint while visiting the U.S. in September 2015. Serra was a Franciscan friar who founded many of the Spanish Missions in California, and it is extremely dubious to some people to characterize Father Serra as a "saint". After all, in his capacity as the primary authority of the Spanish government and the Catholic Church in early California, he was responsible for expanding the Mission system where Native American Indians were more or less forcibly confined and spoon fed new religion and practically made slaves, and many were treated harshly and violently, and tens of thousands died of diseases in the confines of the Missions. Zealous missionaries spread much more than the good word of the

Lord in their evangelizing activities in the New World, and inadvertently spread devastating diseases among the natives in California, as they did in many places in the world.

Ideologies Collide Across a Crucial Continental Divide

Imagine Lady Justice holding her scales aloft, judging the balance between opposing interests. Lady Justice is the personification of the moral force in judicial systems, and she is depicted balancing the scales of truth and fairness. She is thus the honorable embodiment of law, custom and divine order. She is generally seen as carrying not only the scales of justice, but also a double-edged sword that symbolizes the power of Reason and Justice, and she wears a blindfold representing her impartiality in judging the merits of any case. Lady Justice is envisioned as meting out justice in an objective manner, without regard for the identity of competing interests or the amount of money, lack of money, or power or lack of power of the people and interest groups being judged.

Lady Justice is not only regarded as judging cases before her with fairness, but she also prioritizes them according to reasonable sensibilities, unlike the Supreme Court with its odd prioritizing of its docket and ideological biases that are baked into the composition of the Court's Justices, who have been chosen for their lifelong terms by highly partisan Presidents and Senators in our unjust political and judicial system.

Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor appropriately criticized "nakedly partisan reasoning" and political retaliation when senators or congresspersons dislike the result of certain cases, and she sensibly urged that a system for "merit selection for judges" be created. Let's try it!

Many cases figuratively come before Lady Justice in the heavenly firmament. Perhaps the greatest one weighs environmental justice. Exploiters of working people and natural resources are arrayed on one side, along with corporations, CEOs, ideologues and shareholders who champion their cause. On the other side are those who advocate the conservation of resources and the fair treatment of workers and their health and well-being, and the long-term sustainability of human activities.

Lady Justice must adjudicate other significant conflicts of interest, including intergenerational ones concerning short-term expediencies vs. long-term sanity and fairness, and conflicts between Capital vs. Labor that pit the freedom of corporations and rich people and laissez-faire capitalists and states' rights and limited federal government power against workers' rights, living wages, fairly shared prosperity, balanced priorities and ecological sanity. Lady Justice must also evaluate claims of self-styled heroic individual industrialists against those embarked on a commendable hero's journey championing the greater good. Lady Justice presumably ponders the complexity of issues related to the prerogatives of males relative to those of females, and of "pro-life" proponents against "pro-choice" decisions that pit government primacy against women in deciding what limits to place on the personal healthcare rights of females and their reproductive rights and freedoms to determine the course of their lives.

These big picture considerations, in all their infinite complexity, brought my thoughts to a close on an autumn evening in the year 2015, and were affirmed on a sunny afternoon the following Spring, and have been revised in June 2017 and February 2019 and August 2020, and January 2022, and I commend these considerations to readers for their beneficial ponderation and assessment.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Note that Nikos Kazantzakis, the renowned author of *Zorba the Greek*, is said to have enlarged the scope of his worldviews throughout his life to encompass the widest possible expression of his insights, experiences and understandings. Think about this. You and me and everyone all together could benefit from striving to adopt similarly expansive, open-minded and farsighted perspectives!

This manifesto has been undergoing a process of wholesale revisionism in the past five years, in harmony with more comprehensive perspectives materializing in the interstices of our collective imagination. The cool thing about the increasingly refined revisions of these ideas is that they represent an ever bigger picture way of seeing things that positions this revisionism in crystal clear contrast to many other undertakings of historical revisionism that tend to have a purpose of manipulating understandings toward a more narrowly prescribed way of seeing, like Texas

textbook writers who try to construe the past in a context of a more religiously ideological framework, or Donald Trump spewing out a word salad of almost incomprehensible confusion.

The passage of time serves to help elucidate every issue, and this is one reason I have so busily modified this manifesto as the years pass. The essays in the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto have undergone hundreds of revisions submitted to Lulu Press over the years. May they receive world-shaking attention someday!