

Christmas 2013 in Town and Country
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In my 2012 Christmas letter, I doubted that 2013 would be better than 2012. Of course, Marguerite died January 5, 2013 but, having dementia, she had already left me three years earlier. It was not her imminent death that caused my foreboding but the widespread takeover of every cultural feature in our country by corporate money and power. Evident already in 2012, this growing oligarchic plutocracy was and still is arrogantly expanding its influence in business, education, medicine, communication, food, and government at all levels. As I sit in my Capitol Hill townhouse, one mile from the Capitol, and observe our dysfunctional government which no longer governs, i.e. solves the economical and social problems of the country but, instead, engages in faith based ideological posturing (Tea Party) salaried by corporate money and power, I don't see how this broken system will be repaired anytime soon. At least, the issue – whether Big Business or elected representatives should run the country – has become more visible to the voters and is drawing deserved criticism from opponents. Here is a good description of what ails us by Senator Bernie Sanders:

“The great moral and economic and political crisis facing this country, which gets relatively little discussion, is the growing disparity in income and wealth that exists in America. We are in a situation where we have not been since the late 1920s, before the Depression, where the top 1 percent owns 38 percent of the financial wealth of America, while the bottom 60 – *six zero* – percent owns 2.3 percent of the wealth in America. That is obscene beyond belief. The worst wealth inequality in the entire – of any major country in the world. And in terms of income, the last statistics we have seen from 2009 to 2012 tell us that 95 percent of all new income in this country went to the top 1 percent.” (11/27/13, Salon.com)

When my grandson, Albert, visited me last August, I took him on a tour around the inner Basin which is peopled with sculptures of America's most cherished leaders. Here are pictures and quotes from three leaders as to what democracy should aim at and what it stands for.



Thomas Jefferson: “The care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government.” (1809)



George Mason Memorial: He didn't sign the Constitution because it didn't include a Bill of Rights which he had written for the state of Virginia in 1776 and which was later added to the Constitution in 1791. He mentored Thomas Jefferson.



FDR: “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” 1/20/1937

Obviously, the libertarians now in control of the House and The Supreme Court don’t agree with the above statements. They believe that government should be subservient to the free market. The arrogance and assurance of faith based market fundamentalists (i.e. dispensing with government regulations, promoting freedom of global markets, and pursuit of unrestrained corporate profit) has produced unimaginable wealth for a few (1%) and misery for most (60%) in the US. But the profit motivation does not just corrupt government officials, it subtly undermines all other cultural values, too. For example, health should be a value sought for itself with nutrition most probably the key to achieving it. So, why isn’t nutrition scientifically pursued? The NIH has institutes for c. 23 diseases but none for nutrition. In 1994, no state in the U.S. had more than 20% of its population obese; in 2010, no state had less than 20% of its population obese. Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can possess. Why has there been so little progress on heart disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity? Here is T. Colin Campbell’s explanation of how profit subtly displaces health as the ultimate cultural value:

“...there’s another kind of power that’s a lot less noticeable, which I call *subtle power*: power that operates so softly and effectively that its force and source are practically invisible... In a health care system like ours, where profit is the ultimate goal, money is the most powerful force available, allowing those who have it to influence, almost invisibly government policy, the media, popular culture, and the conversations that take place in the privacy of our own homes and minds.

Scientists are more likely to receive research funding and lucrative corporate contracts for research that can produce the next pill, supplement, superfood, or hospital treatment, so *that* research is more likely to get done. Media outlets are punished with the withdrawal of advertising for reporting unfavorably on advertisers’ products, making them less likely to do so; journalists know their salaries depend on that revenue.

Politicians who pass legislation and write statutes favorable to certain kinds of commerce are rewarded with campaign donations from industry groups who benefit from these laws and statutes.... No one called up those scientists, journalists, and politicians and threatened them; no one blackmailed them or offered them a bribe to do something they didn't want to. But behavior that supports the current paradigm is rewarded, and behavior that does not is disincentivized.... This is how a system like ours- in which the goal of ever-increasing profits for the few is pursued at the expense of our health – can continue, even though that goal is not shared by the vast majority of people within it.”
Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition (2013),pp. 194-5.

And the same displacement of health by profit as ultimate value is happening in other cultural areas such as education, medicine, media, environment. etc. But there is some hope for the future. I survive by creating a better religion. By religion I mean the self-world relationship of humans. Humans have been interested, even fascinated, by this relationship from the beginning of recorded history. It has engendered the primitive myths of the past, the grand narratives of present world religions, and motivates the expansion of science into world views, most recently transforming quantum and astronomical discoveries into cosmologies. To spur on the creation of new narratives and orientations to replace the current dominant discourses of religious fundamentalism and market fundamentalism, which have become structures of evil, Marguerite and I decided to initiate an Annual Lecture series in the Humanities at GMU on “interpretation, nature, and values”. Last April, David Orr, probably now the dean of environmental writers, opened the series. Next April, T.Colin Campbell, of *The China Study* fame, will be the speaker.

But I go on too long. Here's Marguerite's last words on her new transformation:



“Remember, two words still sacred are ‘recycle’ and ‘emergence’”

Love to all - Vernon