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No. 210
1 MARCH 21

Editorializing

Times That Try Men's Souls

Thomas Paine, born February 9, 1737, was an English American, a patriot and writer, who authored the pamphlet *Common Sense*, in which we find the following quote, printed December 27, 1776, at the time of the Revolutionary War (1775 - 1783).

Without a doubt, those were times that tried men's souls as the liberty of a nation hung in the balance.

To say that the liberty of the United States of America today is endangered would be an overreach. To say, however, that the religious liberty of the nation today, as envisioned

THESE are the times that try men's souls.

The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly:
it is dearness only that gives every thing its value.

Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods;
and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as
FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

THE AMERICAN CRISIS. (No. 1)
THOMAS PAINE
DECEMBER 23, 1776

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by the founding fathers, is being tried as never before, I believe would be quite accurate. If Thomas Paine could have seen how the Constitution would be battered to where evil would be legalized as a constitutional right, we can imagine he might have written, “Those will be times that assault men’s souls.”

And he would have been right.

Most of the founding fathers were religious men, but not all. It is written of Thomas Jefferson, lead author of the Constitution and the third president of the USA:

“It seems [Jefferson] was probably a Deist who believed that God had created the Earth but didn’t meddle in human affairs. Accordingly, Jefferson rejected Christ’s divinity and instead praised him as a brilliant moral philosopher whose teachings had been corrupted by later biographers.”

While this may be shocking, it is nevertheless a tribute to the common sense of the patriots who midwived the birth of the United States. They believed in the sanctity of life, the right to liberty, while rejecting class distinctions that would bar certain citizens from economic and social positions because of birth.

(Sadly, this perception didn’t apply to all races and it wasn’t until Abraham Lincoln, and a terrible internal war, that universal equality became a legal right – even though, until today, not recognized by all.)

Thomas Paine’s comments are directed to the right to life and liberty. That was the issue of his time.

Today the liberty that many fought and died for is again the issue that is tearing into the fabric of the nation. Inversely, now the right to destroy life and to unrestrained liberty are the predominant issues.

To understand what is happening, we must combine Bible history and geography. In Old Testament times there was a chosen people – the Jews – and a chosen nation, Canaan or Israel. When His people were faithful, heathen nations were either destroyed or driven out. When alliances were made with unbelievers, the believers became unbelievers.

When unbelievers were tolerated, or even welcomed in their midst, inevitably the Jews converted to false gods and idol worship. Thus the injunction for total avoidance of the heathen in their midst makes perfect sense.

During the first six thousand five hundred years of human history something most unusual was taking place. Or rather, *not* taking place. Four continents remained uncolonized. North America, South America, Australia and Antactica. It can be argued that navigational skills had not yet developed to where such voyages were possible. It wasn’t until the advent of the 16th century that different explorers began sailing the high seas. This is a story in itself which we will not go into. We want to zoom in on a particular vessel, the Mayflower, that 401 years ago (1620) dropped anchor in what today is Plymouth, Massachusetts. This is arguably one of the most important events in human history.

There are questions that have no answers – only conjectures. Why did God hold three inhabitable continents in abeyance for six and a half millennia?

Even intelligent conjecture fails us as we try to get a glimpse of what God had in mind. We can, however, take a look at something that happened way back.

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Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

I believe that those verses can have a secondary application to the United States.

That leaves us with two questions:

1) Why a new venue for Christianity?

God knew the changes science and technology would bring to the world in industry, communication and transportation. He also knew that with the cessation of active persecution and a new emphasis on liberty, there would need to be a new world order. There would have to be a model for the rest of the world to follow. Asia, basically a heathen continent, would not do. Neither would Europe, steeped in tradition and with a tarnished history. It would have to be a nation with a clean slate. Thus we paraphrase the above citation:

Now the Lord had said unto Pilgrims and the oppressed, Get thee out of Europe, and bid thy friends and relatives goodbye, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of the United States a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

So why was North America chosen?

(I insert that Canada, part of the North American continent, also played an important role in this, which I do not overlook. However, for the duration of this little writing, comments will be directed toward The United States, which had a center stage role in this migration.)

Antarctica can be ruled out for obvious reasons.

Australia, basically an isolated continental island, did not have the natural resources, nor sufficient arable land to sustain a growing population.

That leaves North and South America. Why not South America with a much larger land mass?

For an answer we consider the opinion of two prolific historians, husband and wife team, Will and Ariel Durant. Their works, rendered in audio, come to nearly 450 hours. Their research was done before the dawn of the computer and in different languages. They point out the influence of climate on civilization. Strange as it may seem, during all of human history a world power has never emerged from a tropical climate. Africa is a case in point. Local powers existed for limited periods of time. In spite of these advances, they were invariably cloaked in a barbaric backdrop, often with almost a total disregard for human dignity.

The Durants say that Africa has never held a prominent place in world events, not because of the color of the skin of the inhabitants, but because of the lethargy produced by a tropical climate. They go on to say that had the color of the skin been light (read as: Caucasian), they too would have lost their ability to create empires.

If what the Durants say makes sense, then it also makes perfect sense that North America would be chosen over South America, a continent in which no country has ever – and will never – achieve world dominance.

It is simplistic to say that only climate determines the progress of a nation. But, I believe that with our weak, mortal minds, we can at least suggest that climate was a factor

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in the divine choice of the North American continent to carry out His “latter day” plans for what we sincerely believe will be the last chapter in the story of civilization before the curtain falls.

Everything indicates Divinity wanted a nation that would be open to, and attract, all peoples of the world. For that to happen there would have to be a diverse climate ranging from sub-tropic to sub-Arctic. There would have to be mountains and plains. There would have to be forests and rivers for navigation. And, possibly above all, there would have to be an abundant reserve of energy beneath the soil to sustain the rapid growth of this continent.

North America was exactly this. The poet can express this much better than I.

This Land Is Your Land

As I was walking a ribbon of highway
I saw above me an endless skyway
I saw below me a golden valley
This land was made for you and me

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island
From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me

I've roamed and rambled and I've followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
And all around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me

The sun comes shining as I was strolling
The wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
The fog was lifting a voice come chanting
This land was made for you and me

You may have never done this, but take time to notice what ethnic groups settled the different geographic regions of the country.

(I here apologize to the great Canadian neighbors to the north of the USA. I am not acquainted well enough with your history to make intelligent observations. If it weren't for all you fine Canadians to the north, well... you would all be fine Americans.)

Just to get a quick glimpse of what I am saying, who settled the Dakota Territory, back when it was necessary to buy a yoke of oxen and a covered wagon to make the dangerous transcontinental trip with their families? The Scandinavians. There they felt at home.

Who settled the endless plains of the Midwest? When I was a boy and we had one of those enormous wooden phones mounted on the wall, it was party lines. What did the ladies get in on when “overhearing” (to not use a less complementary word) the conversations of neighbors on those lines? They heard Swedish, Dutch... and some English.

Enough said on this. You good readers know what I am talking about.

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It was exactly this amalgamation of peoples from most of the ethnicities and nations of the world that made America what Emma Lazarus expressed so beautifully and is inscribed on the Statue of Liberty:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

It wasn't only the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, the homeless and the tempest-tossed who made their way to the Land of Freedom. Some of the greatest minds of that era, scientists, artisans, inventors, as well as men like Benjamin Franklin, who skillfully helped write the Constitution and Bill of Rights that stand today.

The history of the United States of America was made by men and women in times that truly tried men's souls.

In the Revolutionary War, untrained farmers, hunters and tradesmen, with flintlock rifles, faced highly-regimented soldiers in red uniforms. Militarily, few would have placed a bet on the chances of the patriots winning the war. But they did. Because it was foreordained that they would.

The Civil War, a time during which the United States became the "divided States," for a few years presaged that One nation under God would become "One nation under God" and "One nation under slavery." God saw fit to raise a common, self-educated backwoodsman to become president and steer the nation on its preordained course.

Two World Wars. Especially World War II was a time in which the liberty of the world, not only Europe, hung in the balance. Adolf Hitler, the incarnation of Satanic brutality and lust for power launched a blitzkrieg meant to eventually dominate the globe.

If the United States and her allies, had not sent the cream of their youth to Europe to crush the greatest despot of all times and defeated the Axis powers, we today would all be speaking German.

In view of these three wars that were won only because God tipped the balance, are we today again in times that try men's souls?

Yes.

I would encourage readers who find this subject interesting, to read *The Jewish War*, that details the destruction of Jerusalem. Written by the Roman-Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who himself was born in Jerusalem.

We will leave the research of this subject to interested readers. Suffice it to say that Jerusalem was destroyed when His children chose evil over good and God withdrew His hand. Jerusalem was destroyed from within. And again I urge you readers to carefully study what really occurred.

I realize I am skating on thin ice and some of you readers – maybe the majority – will not agree with what I am about to say. This is your right and I will not be offended if you feel to inform me in so many words.

The United States of America was founded on Biblical principles and has rightfully been

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known as a Christian nation. Never in the history of the world has there been a civilized, advanced nation, with a greater emphasis on religious freedom. Yes, Old Testament Israel too was a religious nation, but in a sense it was an imposed religion and never did their numbers reach tens or hundreds of millions.

One more word, in spite of having Brazilian citizenship in addition to my American citizenship, I consider myself a loyal American. In a debate on why I feel America is the greatest nation of all times, I believe I could hold my own. And would enjoy doing so.

The United States today spends more militarily in one day than most nations spend in a month, or more. Barring the possibility of a nuclear war, I sincerely believe the US will never be defeated by foreign armies.

If one day the United States is overcome, it will, as happened in Jerusalem, be from within.

Since its founding, lawmakers carefully avoided creating laws that would be in direct conflict with Old Testament precepts of law. This is most commendable.

Divine justice understands the weakness of human nature. It recognizes that mistakes will be made and mercy is extended to the repentant heart. That changes when transgressions are premeditated and wilfully committed. When, after repeated admonitions there is no repentance forthcoming, judgement replaces mercy and punishment follows. This is seen repeatedly in the Old Testament.

Anyone who has followed Senate confirmation hearings of a presidential nominee to the Supreme Court soon realizes that each hearing is a rerun of the same film. As soon as niceties are taken care of in the initial session – and sometimes not so nice – the all important question is popped: “How do you feel about Roe v. Wade. As many of you readers know, that was the landmark case in which the Supreme Court opened the door to legalized abortions.

If the nominee answers, “I have no problem with it. Roe v. Wade is law and if confirmed I will continue to uphold it in future cases,” he has every last vote from one side of the aisle.

On the other hand, if the nominee is questioned on this heathenistic practice, and he, or she, resorts to non-committal answers, “Well, each case is a case and I can’t say how I will rule before actually hearing the case,” or “The decision is now law and will probably remain so.” Understanding that this codified answer means probable opposition to the practice, he, or she, will get all the votes from the other side of the aisle. And so, the side of the aisle with the most voting members will carry the day.

These choreographed hearings are both hostile and bitter. The nominee who can survive two or more long days pelted by fiery darts must have a herculean constitution.

It is important to remember that this is not an abstract subject that is out of our realm and thus does not affect us.

You who were around the middle of the last century will recall the revulsion we felt when reading about China’s uncivilized methods of population control, in which there were probably more abortions than births.

In Leviticus we read how the Israelites sacrificed their children in the brazen arms of the idol Molech. Revulsion doesn’t cover our feeling for this inhuman perversion.

In late-term and post-birth abortions, there are physicians who will go so far as to sever the spinal cord of full-term babies as they crown. Or worse, if the child is “accidentally”

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born, after consulting the mother and getting her consent, they permit the newborn to die by not giving any kind of nourishment or assistance.

Enough on that.

We could talk about legal same-sex marriages.

Or the criminalization of anyone who “discriminates” e.g. refuses to hire, or give moral support to those who have an alternate life style.

The removal of the Bible from public schools and the tragedy of atheists forcing the removal of the Ten Commandments from public venues are part of this picture.

Will what we have described have consequences?

It is my opinion, for what it is worth, it was when the justices of the United States Supreme Court heard arguments on *Roe v. Wade* and after deliberation, legalized the murder of infants, a line was crossed.

Legal scholars, including conservatives, agree that it is possible that *Roe v. Wade* will be struck down by the United Supreme Court and that abortion laws will be remanded to State legislatures. Should this happen, some states – probably not very many – will abolish the practice. Women seeking to end the life of their unborn children will be obligated to go to neighboring states where the procedure is legal.

I fear this would be too little too late to appease divine wrath. So where does that leave us?

The Civil War divided the nation on the issue of slavery. Today we are again being divided. A superficial glance would make us believe that we are being divided along party lines. The truth goes deeper than that. We are being sorted out by moral values. Political parties are playing host to two divergent philosophies. Let’s notice:

Conservatism is the belief that solid values must be *conserved*.

Liberalism advocates that with the passing of time values change and must be *liberated*, substituted with a new set of rules and conduct that fit into the modern 21st century way of thinking.

Controlled conservatism and liberalism are not a bad thing. They tend to keep excesses in check. This is true, not only in government, but also in religion.

But a complication, an infection, has set in.

The United States was founded as a democratic nation with an economy based on free enterprise, which we know as capitalism. Democracy and capitalism are Siamese twins. They are interdependent.

A bit of history is in order.

Karl Marx, born in Germany toward the end of the 19th century was the brainchild of communism. From the onset, the goal of its proponents has been to establish a new world order. Once they realized that armed revolution could be counterproductive, they instead zeroed in on education and religion. Universities were infiltrated and hundreds of thousands of vulnerable youth were exposed to the the grandiose promise of a formula that would make all men truly equal. The rich would no longer exploit the poor and the poor would have all their needs supplied. No place came under greater assault than the University of Berkeley, in California

The teachers graduating from these institutions went on to implant these ideas in both their grade school and high school students. Others became university professors and the cancer metastasized.

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Publishers were convinced that text books used in school needed to be adapted to reflect this new order.

Seminaries were infiltrated and soon Marxism was being propagated in sermons and homilies. In Brazil the Catholic church swallowed this new philosophy hook, line and sinker and soon there emerged the Teologia da Libertação (Liberation Theology). Fortunately, after a number of years it died a natural death and has been buried.

Finally, the media was infiltrated. This was the greatest success of the Marxists. They were now able to distort the news by printing only one side of an issue.

News organizations began playing host to the left and the right, to liberalism and conservatism. We inject here that the majority are standard bearers for the left and liberalism. The exact same occurrence appears in one publication as negative and in another as positive.

It makes perfect sense that we would like to know what is actually taking place nationally. We would like to know the truth.

Most issues today have become emotional news.

Is covid a scientific fact or a political manipulation?

Should China be kept on a tight leash or accepted as a necessary trade partner?

With skyrocketing medical costs, is Obama Care a good thing, or should it be abolished?

Can the US economy handle what appears to be out of control government spending, bloating the national debt?

Should the Trumpian southern wall be completed and illegals deported?

These, and many others, are emotional issues. Anyone who doesn't have his head buried in the sand will probably have a well-defined opinion on how things should be done. It seems that the air at times fairly crackles with these emotionally charged issues.

Yes, these are times that try men's souls.

We must take care to not be drawn into the vortex of high emotion resulting from inflamed opinions, from both the left and the right. To analyze every move and speech of the president and to believe that enables us to predict the future will bring frustration.

The grace to stand back and attempt to see both the good *and* the undesirable in an administration requires self-discipline. When asked, "What do you think of our president?" what do you answer?

Have you ever thought about...?

"You know, I believe he has the hardest job in the world."

"I wonder what it would be like to have to make decisions daily that affect the lives of millions of people."

"Do I agree with everything he does? No, I don't. But, when I look at the majority of the nations of the world, it is clear that we are a privileged people. Who am I to complain?"

"The Bible teaches us that rulers will have to give account to God – not to me! So I guess maybe I'll kind of stay out of this and let the good Lord handle it."

To take a peaceful stance does not mean we are ignoring the handwriting on the wall. If Bible history is an indicator of what the future holds for us, I believe there is a possibility that totally unexpected events will take place. They will probably not be pleasant.

We can try to keep abreast of political developments and analyze current events, but in the end the only sure refuge will be found in the words of the Psalmist:

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*Be still,
and know that I am God:
I will be exalted among the heathen,
I will be exalted in the earth.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. ▲*

A request

(Sometime ago I was asked to give a talk in a C.E. program. Afterwards someone requested that I transfer my thoughts to paper. So here goes.)

Time in Eternity

A reporter visited a prison. He was amazed to discover that everyone of the inmates knew in how many days his/her sentence would be fulfilled and it would be possible to walk out the front gate, free as a bird.

Those of us who have never been confined to a cell for a number of years can hardly imagine what it would feel like, as we say in Portuguese, “to see the sun come up square.”

Not all prisoners have this hope. There are life sentences without parole. There are those who receive two or three, or more, consecutive life sentences. Yet, there is a bright spot to this. Today’s modern prisons provide balanced meals, clothes, periods of exercise, medical care, a clean bed, and possibly even a television set for entertainment.

As compared with the dungeon in which the prophet Jeremiah was placed to die, these prisons are almost palatial.

I told of a sermon I heard some 60 years ago in the Lone Tree church. I think maybe the evangelist was Min. Daniel Koehn. His theme was eternity.

He pointed to the top of the front, left corner of the sanctuary. He said, “Let’s imagine a hand writes the number 9 in that corner.” The lost sinner who sees that 9 believes that in nine years he will be released from the place of torment in which he finds himself.”

He counts the years, 1, 2, 3...8, 9. In spite of his torments, he feels hope. In 365 days he will be free!

The pain becomes more tolerable. He counts the days. Then the hours.
NOW!

But, instead of the door opening, the same hand appears and prints another 9 along side the first 9. The number now is 99!

The prisoner becomes frantic. 99 years! Even so, he begins counting the years. 98...99... Then the days and hours. As he raises his arms to commemorate, the same hand appears again and the number is 999.

It isn’t hard to guess that the next number was 9,999; then 99,999; and then 999,999. One short of a million years.

We can’t imagine what the number would be if this would continue until the 9 s circled the sanctuary and met, for such a number doesn’t exist.

When there is no room for another 9, then what?
The hand now writes in bold letters:

ETERNITY HAS JUST BEGUN!

In my little talk I asked if there was anything so precious that we would risk facing the 9s after this life.

Out of the many, many examples that could be used, I picked just one.

Offense!

There is probably nothing in life that is easier than becoming offended.

It doesn't matter if you are hungry, thirsty or tired or sick, there is always enough strength to become offended.

Offense is no respecter of persons. It can be dad or mom or son or daughter or our best friend or the preacher or our neighbor or... well, anybody.

Becoming offended is easy.

Becoming unoffended isn't.

Thinking seriously, is there any offense so sweet that you are willing to face the sentence of 9s in a prison that doesn't have balanced meals, clothes, periods of exercise, medical care, a clean bed, nor anything for entertainment? In a place of unrelenting torment?

Eternity isn't a long time.

For time is no more. ▲

Taps

Mark Loewen – Memories

Mark moved to Brazil in 1970 together with his folks, Pete and Edna Loewen. He was 20 years old.

Like most young men moving to a new frontier, Mark enjoyed the challenge of carving a home out of the wilderness. But what he loved most was people – and travelling.

If I were to assign a descriptive name to Mark it would be “Minuteman.”

[Minutemen were civilian colonists who independently organized to form militia companies... during the American Revolutionary War. They were known for being ready at a minute's notice, hence the name. Minutemen provided a highly mobile, rapidly deployed force that enabled the colonies to respond immediately to war threats. —Wikipedia]

That describes Mark Loewen, the preacher, the friend, the helper. He was truly a minuteman. I have no doubt if someone would have knocked on his door at 2 o'clock in the morning and said, “Mark, something came up and I have to be in São Paulo by noon. Would you be willing to go with me?” In a maximum of 30 minutes he would have been out, ready for the trip.

Years ago Mark & Glenda had to take their son Victor to São Paulo for medical treatment. At the same time I needed to go to São Paulo to try and get a laser printer that was held up in customs. So we went together. It was memorable.

We were travelling by subway in the commercial center of São Paulo. He knew exactly which one to take.

He said, “Here we get off.”

Then he said, “Now we will take that one going the other way on the other side of where we are.”

Not to worry.

“There is a tunnel that goes under these tracks. We will cross under them.”

We did and it took us exactly where we wanted to go. Suddenly he looked at his watch and said, “Hey! It is lunch time. I know of a good restaurant right close by.”

We had a delicious meal.

In the middle of São Paulo, a city of more than 12 million inhabitants.

Mark made friends wherever he went. He was totally at ease with Portuguese, behind the pulpit or with friends. He was interested in everyone, and it seemed everyone was interested in him.

Mark & Glenda moved back to the US where more specialized help was available for Victor. I really believe he would have lived here the rest of his life if it had not been for the health issue.

We don't expect everyone who moved to Brazil to stay here for the rest of their lives. What we do like is when they leave is that they are missed. Those who leave with a good taste in their mouth are our ambassadors. They talk about Brazil, well, almost as if it were their homeland.

That was Mark Loewen. We miss him. ▲

Kayro Ambrósio Becker

*By his sister, Sasha Ambrósio Becker
(translated from Portuguese)*

My name is Sasha. I am Otávio and Leila Becker's daughter. My brother Kayro was born on July 26, 2012.

I remember when my mother came home from the hospital and in her arms there was something real small. It was Kayro!

I saw him for the first time and said to my mom, “How absolutely cute! He is so tiny!”

When he was born I was two years old. When he was two years old he was learning to talk. He didn't say a lot of words, but he would call me “Tá” [a mispronunciation of the “Sa” in Sasha]. He called my mom “Mãe” and my dad “Papai” [the Portuguese names for mom and dad].

In our house we have a counter. My mom would put fruit juice on it and sometimes chips or fruit, for us to eat.

Then when he was two years and ten months old he would suddenly jerk his head to the right. We thought this strange, but didn't think that much of it. Then it became more frequent and one time he had six of these. We knew something was wrong. That is how his sickness began.

My folks took him to the hospital and it was a while before the doctors came up with a diagnosis. We learned that it was a degenerative disease and that it has no cure. The sickness is called Tay-Sachs.

The doctors told us that at the most he would live four years, but God gave him double that amount of time and he lived until he was eight years old.

Then on the 20th of November he turned into a little bird and flew away, never to come back.

[As you readers have probably guessed, Kayro was our grandson. His extended life was doubtlessly a gift of God and the around the clock care received from both mother and daughter, and from his dad when home from work. Yes, as a little bird he has flown away, but they are confident that one day they will see him again.] ▲

Opinion

Technology

I am distressed when technology is listed as a modern evil. I prefer to believe that technology isn't inherently evil, but that both good and evil have found out how to make it work for them.

A couple of the reason why I say this:

Live singing. Almost every day we receive on Telegram a listing of groups that will be singing during the day or in the evening. We try to not miss any of these sessions that come from different congregations in the US and Canada.

Because of time zones, we are five hours ahead of PST, so when a group on the west coast sings a song at 7:00 o'clock their time, we get it at midnight here. Last evening the group sang later, so Faith and I were up until 2:00 o'clock listening.

When it is CST, the difference is three hours. 7:00 o'clock there is 10:00 p.m. here. One of our favorite groups are the 9th and 10th graders from a school in California who sing during the day. In a time of booming, profane music, we listen to spiritual songs sung by young men and women (boys and girls hardly does them justice) whose voices ring with sincerity and dedication. I don't know any of the students, nor the teachers, but would love to meet them and sit in on one of their sessions. Live.

Our daughter Denise Dirks lives in South Dakota. Almost always we are tuned in on the same groups. As we listen to the songs we have short exchanges.

"That is one of my favorites."

"Mine too."

"I had never heard this song before. Beautiful."

"It really is."

Why are these little exchanges so technologically astounding? Because when we moved to Brazil our only international communication was by telegram – the real old woodpecker kind. We would hand the message to the operator in Rio Verde, who didn't know English. He would insert errors as it was being transmitted to Rio de Janeiro, where another operator would retype and resend the message to its destination. If, when it reached N America

is was readable, and they replied within a day or two, the reverse procedure would take place. Rio de Janeiro would retransmit to Rio Verde, where it would be typed out and we would receive it when we happened to make our infrequent trips to town. There was a good chance that a week, or more, would pass before we received our answer. Now, my daughter and I sit at ease in our own home and have instant communication.

I do 99 percent of my banking from my home office. I receive bar coded utility bills by e-mail or whatsapp. The same is true for purchases my hired man makes for the chicken barns in stores in town. He signs his name on a receipt and the business sends me a bar coded bill, usually payable within 30 days. So, the banking business that would have used to take a half day to finish, now is a matter of 10 minutes, or less, as I scan the bar codes and the money is deposited in the businessman's bank account. I haven't written a check for years.

If suddenly all the little fingernail sized chips were destroyed in the world, planes would crash, factories would shut down, medical facilities would cease to operate, power plants would no longer generate electricity. So, give us today our daily chips. ▲

Reprint

Felis Catus

Felix Catus is the scientific name for a small furry mammal, better known as a cat.

By original nature the felix catus is family orientated, a typical family being made up of a tomus catus, a momus catus, and a number of kittus catus. Of course, there are grampus and gramus catus too.

There are more than one kind of felix catus. There are the barnus catus that live in barns, the alleyus (sort of hard to pronounce) catus that live in alleys, the strayus catus that all of a sudden just show up or disappear.

Anyone who didn't grow up on a farm with a barn with a hayloftus with hay in it and with stanchions down below with cows in them at milking time being milked by hand, may not know for sure what I'm talking about. But especially on a cold day, at milking time, the whole family – tomus, momus, kittus (if they were big enough), grampus, gramus, unclus and auntus – would show up and take up their stations around the old cast iron kettle that they knew would soon be full of warm, foamy milk. They would never fight like canidae (dogs) or sus scrofas (pigs) do. If necessary, they would wait their turn. When they finished they would sit back and purr and take a lick bath, not unlike the baths some of us used to get on the way to church, when our momus would lickus her hankus and then washus behind our earus – except there was no purring on these occasions. (I know what I am talking about.)

Just having that happy family of barnus catus purring around made everyone else happy and feel like purring too.

But nothing would compare to finding a new nest of baby kittus catus up in the hayloftus. After that every chance we had, we crawled up into the loftus and checked on our baby kittus catus. We would get there and they would be lined up getting their breakfast

or dinner or supper. At this point the momus catus hadn't had time to teach them proper table manners yet, so they would fight like children sometimes do at mealtime.

Then the day would come when one of them would have the corner of his eye open. This would send us into ecstasy. Now the visits were more frequent and each time, like miniature optometrists, we would carefully examine their eyes until they were all completely opened.

So after this they would begin to play. This was when the real fun started.

Let's not get the idea that barnus catus were just for drinking milk and entertaining children. No way. Most farmers had them was to keep the mus musculus (mice) and rattus from taking over the place. In other words, they had to pay their own room and board.

It was a big job. Both the tomus and momus catus worked hard at this. As soon as the kittus catus were big enough, they began to catch mus musculus too.

All in all, the barnus catus family was a functional entity. It's too bad that very few children today have the privilege of enjoying an honest to goodness barn with a loftus with alfalfa and hay and straw bales, with snow blowing outside and with baby kittus catus and the whole family drinking milk at breakfast and supper time out of a big kettle.

I can't tell you much about alleyus catus. All I know is that they live in alleys and don't behave themselves. So people say unkind things about them because they're almost always dirty and have fleas. But since they do catch some mus musculus and rattus, they are reluctantly toleralted.

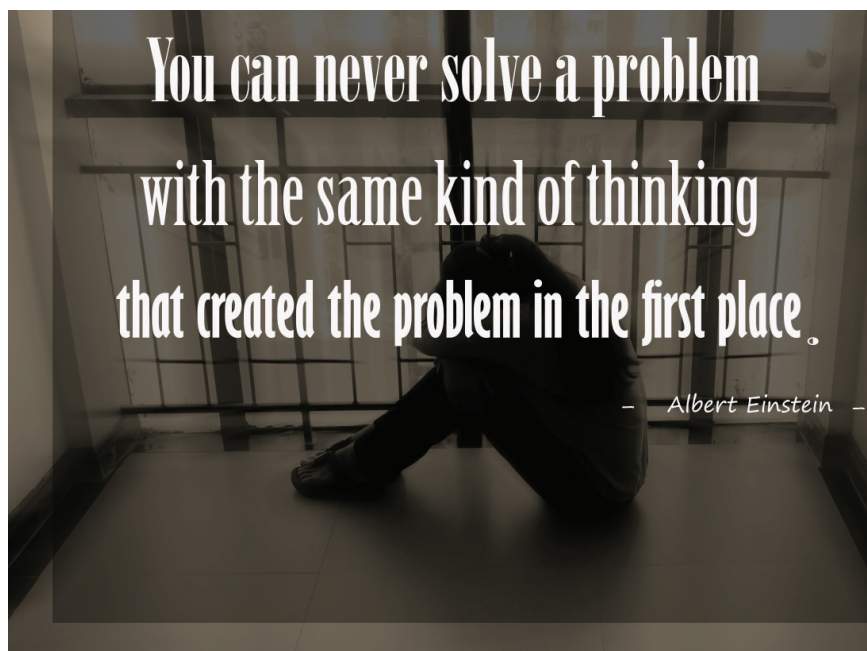
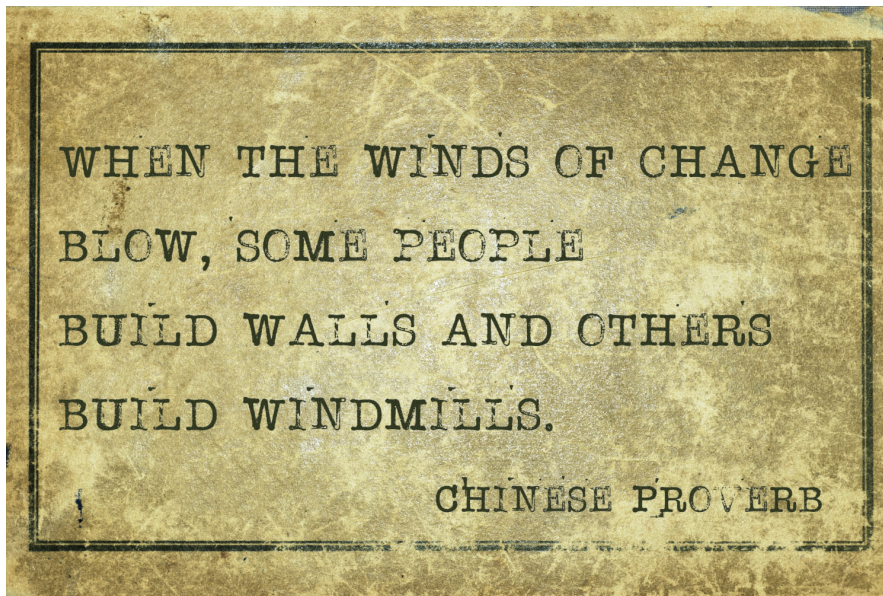
The housus catus. There's a heap of difference between housus catus and barnus catus. The barnus catus make their own living and pay their own way by keeping the mus musculus and rattus population in check. You don't have to be around barnus catus very long to see that they have a lot of character.

The housus catus are different. They do some hunting, as a sport, but depend on Homo sapiens for their living. So suppose you could say they are living off the government. Cut their food stampus and all they do after that is meow and get skinny, except when they are cooking up a batch of kittus catus, which is almost all the time.

The strayus catus. Some of the finest felis catus in this world are strayus catus. They're the ones that show up dirty and skinny and sick and cold (when it's cold). We don't need another catus and we wish they they go away, but they don't. So for humanitarian purposes we give them a bowl of warm milk and are awarded with a vibrant purr which we immediately take to mean, "Thank you." We're hooked and the first thing we know we have a clean, healthy felis catus that we wouldn't get rid of for anything.

Why all this talk about felis catus? Why not talk about Homo sapiens instead? According to scientists we are Homo sapiens. In Latin that means we are people with the capacity to be smart. But when looking this world over, one sees more and more Homo dumiens, people who are losing their capacity to think objectively and make intelligent decisions. The barnus catus type family is becoming an endangered species.

Yes, the barnus catus type family is rapidly disappearing. When this happens the mus musculus and rattus will have their heyday. You know the old saying, "When the felis catus' are away the mus musculus will play!" ▲



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