

October 2006- April 2007

I believe that:

- the religious impulse is universal in that all humans seek to understand the meaning of life and our place in this world.
- while the knowledge of our world is potentially endless, we cannot know the why of it,
- we therefore turn to faith of one sort or another to explain life's mysteries,
- all civilizations have created God (or gods) in their own image, i.e. exemplifying the traits that they considered the most exalted,
- the teachings of Jesus Christ represent a high point to date in this development,
- the Christian prescription of love, charity and forgiveness for one's fellow man codified attitudes which were neither new nor unique, but which had previously never been established as obligations,
- while the religious teachings of a civilization reflect its loftiest aspirations, the inevitable recourse to faith often leads to serious deviations from its ideals through interpretation and the certitude that faith can impart,
- the early Christian categories of seven deadly sins, as articulated by Pope Gregory in the 6th Century*, (and to which the Church proposed opposing virtues) were generally sins of excess, which our current values system seems to regard not only as virtues, but as the backbone of our economic system, thus
 - pride/hubris has taken over our foreign policy in place of modesty
 - envy is Madison Avenue's prime motivator, not charity
 - anger with those we disagree with is rewarded over meekness,
 - sloth/passivity has replaced zeal in pursuing the truth about our world,
 - avarice is now considered the driving force of our economy, relegating generosity to a name for tax write-offs,
 - gluttony has become our major health hazard, seeing as moderation is subversive to the economy,
 - lust, now seen mainly as a driving force of corporate profits, has won the day from chastity, except in evangelical ranting.

*listed in order of decreasing severity by Pope Gregory

- the cardinal virtues, which the early Church listed as: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude are in danger of becoming extinct, or at least have been abandoned, if not under attack, by our current government and the society supporting it.

I believe that:

- many forms of government have evolved in the course of human history and while many have functioned effectively for long periods, the most advanced seen thus far is democracy,
- democracy developed in the midst of serious hypocrisy in ancient Greece and in 18th century America, given that both societies harbored slavery and depended on it for their well-being,
- democracy can exist without slavery or its surrogates and , over time, it cannot meaningfully coexist with slavery,
- democracy depends on a society in which there is a relatively uniform level of educational and economic opportunity,

- vast differences in wealth tend to perpetuate themselves and to undermine the conditions upon which democracy depends;
- the tension between the goals of personal enrichment and the collective well being is eternal and the lack of balance between these forces brings decadence and decline;
- government, being the institutional expression of the public will, exists to further and protect the common interests of the society.
- in an advanced society, ethical concerns will inform the activities of the government,
- in the conflicts of the weak and the strong, the society, through its government, must protect the weak.
- a lottery economy, i.e. winner take all, is inconsistent with both Christianity and democracy,
- ambition, talent and personal initiative exist in uneven distribution throughout human populations.
- these qualities should be encouraged and rewarded to foster meritocracy;
- the most socially productive ambition is stimulated by the desire for excellence, the desire for peer recognition, and the desire to help others;
- in a lottery economy, greed tends to take precedence over these factors as the driver of ambition.
- greed can stimulate ambition but its product is more often short term gain, and its byproducts are corruption and crime.
- there is no need for the government to stimulate or reward greed as it exists in abundance in human nature;
- the American Founding Fathers developed an excellent and far-sighted Constitution, a source of legitimate national pride;
- the recent annulment of the Bill of Rights by the Congress (September 2006) constitutes the subversion of the founding principles of our Republic;

I believe that:

- Arnold Toynbee's thesis that civilizations flourish or die in response to the serious challenges they face is valid;
- the greatest challenge we face today is climate change;
- the second greatest, but not unrelated, challenge is the coming exhaustion of fossil fuels;
- we face other life and death challenges such as environmental pollution, uncontrolled population growth, and the growing disparity between the world's rich and its poor;
- the USA, the world's richest and most powerful nation, has taken the lead in ignoring all of these major challenges;
- the USA has the brains and the other resources to face these challenges;
- the possibility exists that the growing oligarchy has seized control of the political system to the point of no return for democracy,
- the oligarchy, if not restrained, will never face the challenges at hand and will wallow in its excesses until the end of the accelerated decline of our civilization.

I believe that:

- Darwinism, or the theory of evolution, is a useful theory to explain the history of the development of the human race and the world around it;
- Evolution is a theory of history, not a philosophy which provides a guide for human behavior;

- Social Darwinism, the unfortunately named projection of Darwin's theory to provide a guide for human conduct, has been promoted under various names in the past century, by many people including Adolph Hitler, Ayn Rand, Grover Norquist and the various members of the Project for a New American Century, to name a few of the more influential;
- Social Darwinism represents a throwback in man's evolutionary development to pre-Christian, and in some aspects, to pre-historical times.
- The faith in "the Market" to make all the best decisions for human welfare constitutes a new religion, given as much to fanaticism as any Islamic sect, and far less rational than most Christian denominations.
- the evangelical zeal of this new religion is as violent and as dangerous to non-believers as were Mohamed's legions and the Christian crusaders in their day.
- the new religion curiously has not yet settled on a name, although its adherents try to pass themselves off as believers in Democracy or Capitalism.
- both democracy and capitalism have been around longer than the new religion, just as Islam was around long before the extremist Wahabi strain of Islam developed in Saudi Arabia.
- some proponents prefer to describe their creed as Democratic Capitalism, and just as Christian Scientists were far removed from both Christianity and science, the new Democratic Capitalists are profoundly undemocratic, and their monopolistic preferences deviate from early theories of capitalism;
- Marketeers, as we'll call the new faithful, are not necessarily Social Darwinists, but the latter have had a strong influence on the new Marketeer religion.
- the Marketeer gospel of unbridled free trade will waste resources and provoke unnecessary environmental devastation,
- it will reduce workers worldwide to a low common denominator of living standards, not the lowest, but somewhere around the median found in the world today; with disastrous short and medium term consequences in the developed economies;
- it will enrich a small international owner class, which will have neither national loyalties, nor a sense of civic duty.
- Marketeers profess a dislike of government, in that, as noted before, the function of government is to further the collective interests of the society, but they do not eschew the enlargement of government wherever it serves to expand their personal power or fortune.

I believe that:

- every country has the right and duty to defend itself from foreign attack;
- no country has the right to attack another country except as a response to an attack by the aggressor nation, or as required by mutual defense treaties.
- the invasion of Iraq by the USA does not meet these criteria;
- the invasion and occupation of Iraq were illegal under both International and American law.
- the public justification for the invasion was a series of oft-repeated and knowing lies.
- the people who ordered these actions are war criminals and should be prosecuted as such, under precedents established by the American Government at the Nuremberg Trials.

I believe that:

- all advanced nations distinguish between crimes against persons and crimes against property and that usually crimes of violence are justly regarded more harshly,

- crimes against property should be punished with some degree of proportionality between the amount of the damage and the punishment imposed;
- some crimes against property, where they impair a person's livelihood, are little different than crimes of violence against that person;
- white-collar crime has usually been exempt from that consideration and its punishment has rarely been even vaguely proportional to that meted out to common criminals.

I believe that :

- war is armed conflict between nations
- terrorism is a tactic of desperate people
- "war on terrorism" makes no more sense than hundreds of other malapropisms of President Bush;
- a "war on terror" is as much of an affront to reasonable standards of language as a war on drugs or on crime, poverty, pimples, greed, sarcasm or sin.
- strength, statesmanship and diplomacy are the tactics by which struggles with differing points of view can best be waged
- acts of terrorism are major crimes, which can and must be prosecuted as such.
- treating criminals as entities similar to nations inflates their egos and, in some circumstances, their prestige among our enemies.
- terrorist tactics are often undertaken to modify a government's policies where other tactics have no chance of success;
- if such acts result in the target government changing its policies to the detriment of the rights of the governed, or to the advantage of the perpetrators, the terrorist acts can be considered to have been successful, and will be considered justified by their proponents;
- the American invasion of Iraq constituted an undreamed of success for the Islamic jihadists.
- the American de facto repeal of the Bill of Rights constitutes the greatest success of the Islamic terrorists to date.