

## LOVE VERSUS GREED\* A KEY TO THE PROLONGATION OF LIFE

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Confucius stated that, "The Universe has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." In the days of creation, Adam and Eve were given Eden, a paradise where life was abundant enough for their daily needs. They breathed clean air, inhabited healthy surroundings which had adequate food for their satisfaction and contentment, and gave them no worries about tomorrow's supply.

Because of the bounties human beings enjoyed and their simple life, gathering just enough to meet their daily needs, they lived a long time. The Bible says that humans then lived longer than today - more than hundreds of years. Records show that the oldest man, Methuselah lived to be nine hundred and sixty years old. Abraham died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five. What is the secret? They loved their fellow human beings and their environment and did not abuse them. Thus, man attained the prolongation of life.

In the course of time, man becomes discontented with life. We aspire to possess more than is needed to supply our needs. Thus, we amass wealth, and gather and grab from the land and the sea, the resources and everything therein to gain power and riches, depriving others of the resources God provided to all living creatures in this universe. In simple terms, humankind has indulged in greed to satisfy his wants, to the deprivation of his fellows and other living beings.

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### **The Consequences of Greed**

As a result of its ambition to accumulate possessions, humanity continually seeking ways to gain wealth and power and is pressured to devise ways to achieve its goals, irrespective of whether or not fellow human-beings are abused. When they fail to get what they want, humans develop anxiety, discontent and frustration, all of which shorten life. To attain its objectives, humanity has constructed industries, engaged in the production of nuclear weapons, carried out illegal logging and dynamite fishing; all of which has resulted in environmental degradation. Wars among nations, pollution on top of pollution - all these and thousands of other things have shortened life on this our Mother Earth.

What makes life today complicated and difficult, as well as challenging and interesting, is the opportunity to make choices. In ancient or tribal cultures, there was hardly any choice, except in the very basic sets of right versus wrong, good versus evil and life versus death. Life was much simpler then; decisions and choices were dictated by rigid guidelines.

Civilisation, and then the Renaissance, opened minds to heretofore unexplored aspects of existence. Cogito ergo sum pin-pointed the primacy of the mind and of the never-ending processes of change. Choices bring about change, usually in the name of progress. Individuals have chosen progress in their personal and environmental lives. Thus, although they are depriving their fellows of the resources that their fellows need to meet their needs, they do not care as long as they are able to achieve their ends in the name of greed.

By engaging in wars, power-conscious nations have destroyed the balance of Nature - Nature, God's gift to mankind that they may live abundantly. In 1991, CNN television footage of blazing Kuwait oil wells depicted noontime soot-induced midnight skies. The effects of the Persian Gulf War ranged from alteration of weather, possibly including the crucial Asian monsoon, to oil quagmires that stretched across national frontiers and trapped birds. Black rain and oil-fire soot, which stained once-pristine snow as far away as the Himalayas, have also affected health in the war-torn areas. This is similar to the Nagasaki and Hiroshima atomic bomb explosions, where generation after generation has shown adverse effects. These effects have been manifested by mutagenic indicators which has shortened the life of their offspring.

Another aspect of greed concerns political ideology: who has the supreme ideology? Israelis and/or Palestinians? It is interesting to note that these two have signed a Peace Pact to end their political war. Ambition for power, supremacy of religion and/or ideology have, clustered together, affected our environment thus generating "Eco-War." Eco-war must be renounced in the name of the borderless world that is the

only home we have. Our embattled planet must outlast those who threaten it. It is clear that if earth is today's hostage and every nation is a prisoner held for a ransom that no nation can pay.

Nations, in their desire to become rich, develop industries using chemical compounds such as CFC gases. CFC's are simple chemical structures, cheap to manufacture. They are non-toxic and inert and do not combine easily or vaporise at low temperatures. CFC's are ideal coolants in refrigerators and propellant gases for spray cans which can contain anything from deodorants to insecticides. CFC's are also excellent for cleaning electrical circuits in plastic-foam materials such as Styrofoam.

In the mid-1970s the world became aware that the protective ozone shield in the atmosphere was endangered by CFC's and halos (gases used in fire extinguishers). In the upper atmosphere ozone takes on a life-sustaining role, protecting plant and animal life from excessive exposure to highly dangerous ultraviolet light (UV). At the upper layer of the earth's atmosphere, under intense ultraviolet bombardment from the sun, molecules of oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) are split into single atoms. Some of these single oxygen atoms rejoin existing molecules to form ozone (O<sub>3</sub>). Ozone is dispersed throughout the stratosphere, 15-50 km. above the earth's surface, stopping most of the sun's dangerous ultraviolet rays from reaching the surface of earth. In 1972 James Lovelock demonstrated that CFC-12 remains intact in the upper atmosphere and spreads out from the largely industrial northern hemisphere to Antarctica. In 1974, two scientists, Mario Molina and Sherwood Rowland, discovered that CFC's could destroy ozone.

At the earth's surface, CFC's are non-reactive. However, once they reach an altitude of 15-50 kilometres, they break down. Ultraviolet rays cause them to break apart, releasing chlorine atoms which then combine with oxygen to form highly reactive molecules of chlorine monoxide (ClO) which attack ozone. In a cyclic reaction, each molecule can set in motion a series of chemical reactions which result in the destruction of up to 100,000 molecules of ozone, without itself being destroyed itself in the process.

Nimbus 7, an American weather satellite, revealed that winter ozone levels in the northern latitudes have been reduced by as much as eight per cent over the past decade. It now appears that the earth's protective layer is being depleted very rapidly. The thinning of the ozone layer caused by this release of chemical compounds from the advanced and/or highly technologically-developed industrialised countries has deprived the underdeveloped countries of the shield formed by the ozone layer. This scenario reveals that in their efforts to amass wealth, nations abuse the natural environment to the disadvantage of other nations which do not have the capacity to generate resources.

Greedy in the hearts of people and nations has adversely affected a natural environment which once upon a time was a paradise that made life on our planet satisfying and blissful. Now, because people and nations tend to amass wealth and power to attain their ambitions, the environment has become a paradise lost. With this loss, life has shortened.

The present state of the Philippine environment exemplifies this phenomenon. It has been altered quite significantly. The most glaring evidence of this is the rapid destruction of the forest and the inevitably adverse consequences of this ecological infraction. Myers, who divided countries according to rates of forest conversion, put the Philippines together with Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh, all of which have rapid broad scale forest conversion rates and, in short, all have bad cases of deforestation.

The fact that the Philippines has one of the smallest remaining areas of old-growth forests aggravates an already bad situation. Since the Philippines was originally almost all forest, this situation indicates that it faces a grave environmental peril. The pivotal ecological influence of the forests on other ecosystems makes the threat much more serious. Deforestation induces alterations in the natural states of other ecosystems. The state of Philippine forests reflects in fundamental, as well as large measure, the state of the Philippine environment. The amount of marginal land indicates the havoc that has been wrought on the forests.

The loss of the sustainability of forest lands has caused a decline in the productivity of the croplands. The Philippines has the lowest annual yield of paddy rice in the region. While productivity depends on a number of variables, the fact is that the Philippine situation is partly the result of environmental deterioration. Deforestation of the watersheds has resulted in severe water supply problems in many regions.

Croplands are artificially-made ecosystems. Their condition measures the level of human skill in managing nature. They are losing their productive capacity which indicates the deterioration of their state and of our knowledge about them. When natural systems are transformed into managed ecosystems, sustainability can be assured if the technology for the maintenance of their productive capacities is available.

The natural state of the more populated coastal areas has also been considerably altered. The conversion of mangrove swamps into fishponds, the destruction of coral reefs and pollution have compromised the sustainability of coastal fisheries. Collectively, these factors have reduced the catch per unit effort of municipal fishermen. For the 800,000 municipal fishermen in the country, the quality of life has fallen from bad to worse.

Because of the low productivity of croplands and forest in the rural areas and other provinces, people tend to congregate in the cities where they create a squatter problem. This in turn causes a major pollution problem. Shanties are built along creeks and in government reservation land or parks. Congestion of land space and the clogging of creeks and rivers by domestic wastes are the result. Squatters are a privileged group in the Philippine environment because they are protected and wooed by politicians for their votes during election periods. Vested

interests predominate again.

Because of pollution in the environment, the death rate is increasing. The death rate in the Philippines is 60 percent higher than that in any other country in Asia. In fact, the mortality rate in the Philippines is about three times that of Malaysia, and almost six times that of Singapore. This data implies that environmental deterioration plays an important role.

One of the factors that determines the quality of the environment in the Philippines is the political economy. The political economy is the structure of a country's productive system and its relationship to the structure of political power. The history of commercial forestry reveals the significance of the political economy in the denuding of Philippine forest lands. The control of the forests by relatively few concessionaires, combined with tenure problems in the lowlands, government corruption and the failure to collect rent, has led to the rapid decimation of the forests. Unless social equality in the use of ecosystems is promoted, production cannot be sustained and its collapse will be imminent. If the foregoing practices could be changed, problems such as environmental abuse, war, poverty, famine, sexual exploitation and sexual discrimination resulting in human degradation and greed would be solved, resulting eventually in a maintainable and sustainable prolongation of human life. To summarise the foregoing scenarios, greed is reflected in:

- the abuses of the earth's ecosystem
- poverty that stifles life's potential
- hunger that weakens the human body
- economic disparities that threaten many families with ruin
- the social disarray of the nations
- the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin
- anarchy which overtakes our communities
- the death of children from violence
- aggression and hatred in the name of religion

In shadow of these horrors, the Declaration of the Global Ethic (1993) offers the possibility of a higher order of life on both an individual and global level, leading individuals away from despair, and societies away from chaos. As a consequence, better individuals, living in global order, would foster a prolongation of life. I quote from the Declaration of a Global Ethic, Parliament of the World's Religions (1993):

*We Declare: We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of earth, the air, water and soil.*

*We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.*

*We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practising a culture of solidarity and relatedness. We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.*

*We must strive for a just social and economic order in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money and consumption, to make a just and peaceful world.*

## **The Greatest is Love**

The foregoing Global Ethic is fundamentally based on love. As all living creatures and plants are interdependent, it is love that binds us all in peace and understanding. In order to have harmonious relations with other living beings, we must show love to one another, realising the Biblical meaning of love in I Corinthians 13:4-7: Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; Love does not keep a record of wrongs; Love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail.

The first fundamental truth about our individual lives is the indispensability of love to every human being. "Love" means relatedness to some treasured person or group, the feeling of belonging to a larger whole and of being of value to others. The source of all the basic anxieties in human nature is a feeling of being alone and helpless in a hostile world and the first compulsion of life is the weaving of a stable pattern of

relationship between ourselves and our parents, and all of those who in time take the place of our parents - the beloved, the friend, the co-worker.

Today, science teaches us we can understand the universe only in terms of relatedness; that things are nothing in themselves, in isolation; that even the atom has significance only in some organised pattern. Carbon atoms, for example, form charcoal when treated in one way and diamonds when treated in another. Everywhere we turn in the laboratory, whether in physics, chemistry, biology or psychology, we find that isolation is what is impossible and that relationship is everything. A lone atom is a meaningless atom. A related atom is the building stone of nature. A lone human being is a destroyer of values; a related human being is the builder of individual and social peace. Real progress in the world is not "self-creating society" but rather "society creating the self." Thus, a society in which everyone shares what they have must be the goal of everyone. Thinkers like John Dewey and George Herbert Mead have explored the eighteenth-century idea that the individual is endowed at birth with a "mind," by means of which he enters into social relationships. Our dependence on others is not a matter of religious idealism, but rather, the most encompassing fact of human reality. "Thou shalt have relationships with thy neighbours" is a law of psychological life and many of our most difficult problems arise from the operations of this law. If we understand this relatedness, we will interact more easily with our family, friends, business associates, co-workers and ourselves.

In many instances, greed is masked by love. Our political leaders, in the parlance of development, "manage" the construction of feeder roads on mountains and valleys. In reality, they have ulterior motives such as creating access to unexplored gold mines in their concessions. Poor tribes, deprived of their ancestral lands, are driven away and relocated in settlements where they do not have even a hectare of land to cultivate. They are forced to leave the graveyards of their forefathers, whom they worship and consult in troubled times (Gatchalian, 1982).

That Mt. Pinatubo erupted in 1991 is well-known. It is expected that it will take ten to twenty-five years for Mt. Pinatubo to unload its lava. Although our government has allocated billions of pesos every year since the eruption for the construction of dikes, the dredging of silted rivers and the relocation of the inhabitants of adjacent towns and provinces of Central Luzon, such as Pampanga, Tarlac and Zambales, it is disheartening to note that at least 30% of the funds allocated have gone to political leaders who have engaged in graft and corruption. In this case, the prevalent element is greed. In the spirit of love and casting out greed, for the prolongation of the life of humankind, I would like to quote, once again, from the Declaration of a Global Ethic:

*In conclusion, we appeal to all the inhabitants of this planet. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed. We pledge to work for such transformation in individual and collective consciousness for the awakening of our spiritual powers through reflection, meditation, prayer or positive thinking for a conversion of the heart. Together we can move mountains. Without a willingness to take risks and a readiness to sacrifice, there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to a common global ethic, to better mutual understanding, as well as to socially beneficial, peace-fostering and earth-friendly ways of life.*

If love reigns among nations and peoples, each of us loving our neighbours, sharing with others what we have and getting enough resources for our daily needs and living in harmony with our fellows and nature, we will finally gain peace, happiness and joy: the formula for the prolongation of life. We must do this taking note that "the greatest of these is love."

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